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

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In the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, Jewish women in Germany created a network of independent women's voluntary societies. In so doing, they established themselves in a sphere that previously had constituted an overwhelmingly male arena. Before non-Jewish women founded similar associations, Jewish women had erected and led sick-care societies, most of them mutual-aid associations, and other benevolent societies. In fact, between 1745 and 1870, more than 160 Jewish women's associations were operating throughout German lands, many of them for decades. This remarkable involvement of women in Jewish associational life became possible because the character of Jewish voluntary societies had changed in the process of the social and cultural embourgeoisement of Jewish communities. As German Jewry embraced Enlightenment and bourgeois ideas of sociability and civic responsibility, male practices of religious learning ceased to define the world of Jewish voluntary societies. In the course of this development, Jewish women came to lead associations that equaled modern male societies in purpose, form, and range of activity.

Women had had no access to the religious practices that had stood at the heart of early modern Jewish voluntary societies, called hevrot or confraternities. Early modern male hevrot were prayer circles, and their most important religious practice consisted in communally studying Mishnah—the central text of Talmudic literature—in the house of a deceased person. However, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, male youth hevrot began to break out of the religious framework of pre-modern Jewish associational life. Jewish men in German lands introduced mutual-aid features in existing hevrot and founded sick-care associations with self-help func-
tions. In the statutes and founding documents of these voluntary associations, progressively minded male Jews adopted a rhetoric of friendship, love of humanity (Menschenliebe), morality, civic responsibility, and self-improvement. They embraced Enlightenment and bourgeois values and concomitantly often reduced or discontinued religious learning within the hevrah (singular of hevrot).

Jewish women's associations emerged parallel to the male ones in which men had abandoned or curtailed the study of rabbinic literature. These societies proliferated as women's sick-care and mutual-aid associations, and often women also engaged in other benevolent activities such as caring for women in childbirth. These Jewish women's societies of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries at times preceded comparable non-Jewish female voluntary associations. The rise of Jewish women's voluntary societies thus appears to have been primarily a function of the shift in values and practices within the Jewish community. In fact, the decline of Hebrew learning among men not only facilitated the emergence of Jewish women's associations as a standard feature of Jewish communal life, but also gradually allowed women to play a more equal role in the religious practices within Jewish voluntary societies themselves.

In nineteenth-century Germany, studying Mishnah fell into disuse as a mourning rite. Instead, commemorating deceased family members in yahrzeit (anniversary of death) services drew heightened attention. Jewish men's voluntary associations whose members no longer engaged in regular prayer and study hired a minyan for yahrzeit commemorations. Female Jewish societies adopted the same practice; consequently, men's and women's associations assumed parallel religious functions. Moreover, in the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish women's associations in Germany began to take on the performance of burial rites as part of their formal activities, and in this domain too, women's voluntary societies came to equal male ones.

In the realm of Jewish voluntary societies, like in the culture of prayer and in the nineteenth-century synagogue, the decline of halakhic Judaism attenuated the marginalization of women. In a Jewish associational life in which Menschenliebe and self-help featured prominently and in which Talmud Torah and Hebrew prayer no longer stood at the center, women experienced an unprecedented degree of inclusion.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF JEWISH MEN’S VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES

The prototype and the earliest and most common form of a hevrah in pre-modern Ashkenaz was the men's hevrah kaddisha (holy confraternity), the male burial society. Other hevrot followed, and together they cared for the
dead of a community and provided for the needy. In fact, whatever the name of an association and whatever its statutes claimed to be the function of the club, a *hevrah* tended to fulfill more than one purpose. The members of *hevrot* came to engage in a variety of charitable activities, including visiting and caring for the sick, disbursing dowries to poor girls, and distributing heating fuel to scholars. Some early modern Jewish voluntary associations may indeed have never have performed burials and burial rites. Yet members of all *hevrot* enjoyed high esteem in Jewish society, had particular responsibilities, and enjoyed certain privileges.1

As a rule, when a member of a *hevrah* died, his fellows had the honor and the duty to study Mishnah in the house of the deceased during the first seven days of mourning, a period known as *shivah*. Members were also required to participate in funeral rites, visit the sick, and do whatever else the statutes of their association demanded. They were also expected to attend the *hevrah's* study sessions and worship services. The members of a *hevrah* usually prayed together, communally engaged in learning religious texts, and often employed a rabbi or a teacher. To express this differently: a *hevrah* was a prayer circle whose members aspired to fulfill the *mitzvot* of studying Torah, giving charity (*zedakah*), and performing “acts of loving-kindness,” called *gemilut hesed*. *Gemilut hesed* encompassed various benevolent acts, among which “the value of providing proper burial for the dead, referred to as *hesed shel emet* (literally, an act of true loving-kindness) was the first to take on separate, institutionalized form.”2

In their core prayer and study circles, *hevrot* constituted a male domain. Yet it is certain that Jewish women always performed the washing, dressing, and guarding of female corpses. Women sewed shrouds and cared for the dead, but did so under the direction of male burial societies, or were hired by the Jewish community or the family of the deceased directly. Only in exceptional cases, it seems, did women form their own burial societies and other female voluntary associations. In fact, even within the burial and sick-care societies they founded and ran, Jewish women were unable to fulfill the functions that men did. Women could not constitute a halakhically defined prayer group (a *minyan*), and neither could they study Mishnah in the house of a deceased. Although in practice not every men's *hevrah* may have expected their members to assemble daily to study religious texts and pray, the rise of Jewish voluntary societies in early modern Ashkenaz had formed part of the establishment of a Jewish culture of universal male learning in Western and Central Europe. Early modern *hevrot* fulfilled social functions, but the societies were driven by a religious impetus, and the marginalization of women in the early modern culture of Jewish learning and worship pre-empted any significant participation of women in Jewish associational life in pre-modern Ashkenaz.3
This situation changed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Halakah and rabbinic culture ceased to constitute the central and dominating frame of reference in Jewish society. The study and worship functions of hevrot diminished in importance, and the charitable, social, educational, and mutual-aid aspects of Jewish voluntary associations gained new meaning. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, new types of associations proliferated in German society at large, and young Jewish men, too, founded a new generation of Jewish associations. They were influenced by the German Enlightenment and its Jewish equivalent, the Haskalah, and established novel types of Jewish voluntary societies including the Gesellschaft der Freunde (Society of Friends) in Berlin and Königsberg and the Gesellschaft der Brüder (Society of Brothers) in Breslau. These two associations are well known for embodying and propagating Enlightenment ideas; in particular, the Gesellschaft der Freunde gained fame for its role in the early burial controversy. The Gesellschaft der Freunde and the Gesellschaft der Brüder, however, were only the most prominent and the most fashionable exponents of an entire movement of Jewish youth hevrot that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. In Berlin, Dresden, Heidelberg, Prague, and other German and Central European towns, unmarried Jewish men established similar societies.4

These associations functioned within the orbit of early modern Jewish voluntary societies. Yet their statutes included provisions that constituted a significant departure from established hevrot. Members of this new type of hevrah still engaged in acts of gemilut hesed such as visiting the sick, burying the dead, and providing relief to the poor, and most youth hevrot likely held prayer services and study sessions. Membership in some of these associations, such as the Gesellschaft der Freunde, however, entitled young men to receive medical care and financial benefits when sick or in need. This was a radically new practice for sick-care societies.5

Previously, sick-care societies, appropriately called hevrot bikkur holim (societies for visiting the sick) had focused on offering spiritual support in illness and death and had not dispensed monetary benefits. When a member of a hevrah had received a financial contribution, it constituted an act of charity rather than as payment to a self-respecting member. Furthermore, in early modern hevrot, young men tended to be barred from leadership positions before they married, and many Jewish voluntary associations only admitted well-established community members. In the emerging type of mutual-aid sick-care societies, young men expressed new self-confidence and created frameworks that provided them with adequate medical care and with financial support when they fell ill. At least some of their members had moved recently to the towns and cities in which they lived. For these men, residence rights were precarious, family support was absent, and
in cases of sickness or need, they depended on communal charity boards that only reluctantly assisted foreigners and newcomers.\(^6\)

The rise of specialized mutual-aid societies constituted one of the important features of the transformation of Jewish associational life in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany. In Hamburg, the emergence of a number of small death-benefit chests (Sterbekassen), which differed dramatically from burial societies and other early modern hevrot, illustrates this development. Typically, these death-benefit chests held neither prayer services nor religious study sessions. Their members performed no ablutions, refrained from guarding or burying the dead, and did not comfort families of deceased Jews. Moreover, Sterbekassen did not provide a minyan for the period of mourning. Rather, the function of a death-benefit chest consisted solely in subsidizing the burial fees that the hevra kadishah charged. The associations sometimes paid shivah benefits, replacing some of the income a family lost when abstaining from work during the seven days of mourning. One of the earliest death-benefit chests, Zorkhei Keburah Hevrah (Association for Burial Needs) was founded in 1718, in a period in which a remarkable number of non-Jewish burial-benefit societies emerged in Hamburg. The name Zorkhei Keburah Hevrah, in fact, suggested that the association from its inception was not a conventional burial society whose most important function consisted in reading Mishnah in the house of a deceased fellow. By contrast, a Hamburg death-benefit chest called Gemilut Hasadim (Acts of Loving-Kindness) still held daily prayer services and study sessions in the mid-nineteenth century.\(^7\) Whatever their individual character and trajectory, by then most death-benefit chests in the city resembled modern insurances. They had come a long way from the type of Jewish associations that had drawn their raison d’être from the halakhic prescriptions of Torah study, zedakah, and gemilut hesed.

The transition from early modern male hevrot to nineteenth-century mutual-aid societies found expression in the new range of functions that Hamburg’s Jewish associations fulfilled. The association Agudah Jescharah (Honest Society), for instance, which was founded around 1780, pioneered in financially supporting sick members. Other societies in Hamburg at the time came to dispense dowries, loans, or monetary donations to members. The Synagogenverein (Synagogue Association) had served its members for more than a century, when the society reconstituted itself in 1844 as the Krankenverein tröstender Brüder (Sick-Care Association of Consoling Brethren). The new statutes of the society declared that the previous form of the association no longer corresponded “with the spirit of the times,” and in fact, the society now disbursed financial benefits to members who were ill.\(^8\) Thereby, the Krankenverein tröstender Brüder resembled many other Jewish as well as non-Jewish sick-benefit societies of mid-nineteenth-century
Hamburg. The change of emphasis from the synagogue to the mutual-aid function of the association exemplifies the process in which Enlightenment and bourgeois values such as ideas of friendship and mutual support increasingly supplemented or even substituted for the religious parameters of Jewish associational life.9

Higher love of humanity came to replace a charity that sought reward in a religious framework, the 1832 report of the Verein für Krankenpflege (Association for Sick Care) in Hamburg stated.10 Rabbinic Judaism certainly had always promoted ideals of love and support between humans. Performing benevolent acts, however, had carried implications that transcended their social purpose. The recipient of zedakah or gemilut hased had fulfilled his or her function in the religious economy by allowing the donor to acquire spiritual benefits. Distinct from this theological frame of reference, the Hamburg Verein für Krankenpflege laid out the modern concept of benevolence in the preamble to its founding statutes of 1831:

Even though our foundation in its effects is a benevolent one, it actually does not perform charity in the narrow sense toward its members, since those receive in the days of sickness only the compensation for what they contributed to the association earlier. However, all members have the opportunity to perform countless charitable deeds; the wealthy man can invest a part of his abundance profitably and everybody can engage in acts of benevolence for the association and for humanity by visiting a member in his sickbed (Schmerzens-Lager) and by caring for a suffering friend.11

Thus, on the one hand, members of the association still had the opportunity to perform disinterested acts of loving, kindness, and charity. On the other hand, the preamble did not refer to charity as religious concept. Rather, performing acts of charity and indeed maintaining membership in the association itself constituted a benevolent deed in the interest of mankind. Moreover, according to this preamble, the Verein für Krankenpflege avoided anything that could hurt “the most tender sense of honor” of its members, described as “individuals of the educated and refined (gebildete) classes.”12

Friendship, love of humanity, and concepts of bourgeois respectability had advanced to the center of the benevolent enterprise. In sick-benefit associations such as the Verein für Krankenpflege, Jewish men insured themselves against the risk of sickness and thereby assisted each other in improving and maintaining their social and economic standing. In early modern Jewish society, notions of spiritual benefits and divine retribution had provided the conceptual framework for benevolent activities. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, benevolence aimed at fulfilling a civic
THE EMERGENCE OF JEWISH WOMEN’S SICK-CARE SOCIETIES

In the middle of the eighteenth century, when Jewish men introduced mutual-aid features into existing hevrot and created new sick-benefit and sick-care societies, Jewish women began to found parallel associations. In Frankfurt in 1761, five married women followed the example of the men in the Jewish community who had already established two sick-care societies. The women created what was to become one of the largest female Jewish associations of the era: the Israelitische Frauenkranken-kasse (Israelite Women’s Sick Fund). This association offered a range of services to its members, including doctor’s visits, care by hired attendants, medicine, and financial support. The voluntary society also assisted members in traveling to Wiesbaden for treatment at the spa, when a physician prescribed such a therapy. This modern women’s sick-benefit association was not much more than a health insurance organization. Regular members did not visit or care for patients. When the chairwomen paid visits to sick members, they did not primarily offer personal and spiritual support. Rather, these women supervised the care the patient received by attendants and doctors and checked up on the women who received financial contributions from the association. Furthermore, the Israelitische Frauenkranken-kasse neither expected its members to play a role in burying their deceased colleagues, nor did the association cover any costs related to the proper disposal of a dead body. However, for a deceased member, the association assumed responsibility to arrange for ritually prescribed measures such as the guarding of the body and the sewing of the shrouds.

Moreover, the Israelitische Frauenkranken-kasse paid for one service surrounding death: daily prayer services during the mourning period that followed the passing of a member. Remarkably, this benefit extended even to members who were not eligible for sick-care benefits, such as girls under the age of seventeen and women who had entered the association when they were more than sixty years old. This regulation suggests that the Frankfurt women’s sick-care society had paying members who belonged to the association not because of the sick-care benefits the organization offered. These members may have joined the association in order to assure
that they were properly attended to after their demise and that a minyan was held on their behalf.\textsuperscript{16} While the \textit{Israelitische Frauenkranenkasse} of Frankfurt thus served primarily as a mutual-aid sick-benefit society, it also fulfilled some of the functions of a burial society in a modernized, professionalized form.

In the eighteenth century, German Jews founded similar women’s sick-care societies in Mainz, Dresden, and Mannheim.\textsuperscript{17} And Jewish women throughout Germany continued to do so in the nineteenth century. They established women’s sick-care associations, often within a few years after Jewish men in a community had founded a similar society. In Würzburg, for instance, a group of women created the \textit{Israelitische Weibliche Kranken-Unterstützungs-Verein} (Israelite Female Sick-Support Association) in 1844, after the model of an already operating male society. However, although the association understood itself to be a mutual-aid society, primarily directed toward the needs of its members, it did not disburse standard benefits. Sick members received monetary support only when they were in need of it. Rather, the \textit{Israelitische weibliche Kranken-Unterstützungs-Verein} of Würzburg stressed sick visits and personal care for sick members in practical as well as in spiritual matters. According to the by-laws of the association, a member who had fallen ill was to receive two visits per day from her colleagues as well as medical care if necessary. If the sickness took a more serious turn, the association not only expected members to stay with the sick woman day and night, but also to pray for her or to lead her in prayer. Furthermore, women belonging to the \textit{Israelitische weibliche Kranken-Unterstützungs-Verein} performed the washing and dressing of deceased members. In the same period, the \textit{Israelitische Frauen-Verein} (Israelite Women’s Association) of the small town of Gedern in Hesse operated in a similar fashion.\textsuperscript{18}

In May 1860, at least forty Jewish women in the town of Grünstadt in Rhineland-Palatine (\textit{Rheinpfalz}) assembled to found what appears to have been the first Jewish women’s association in this community.\textsuperscript{19} In exchange for a monthly fee, the women who belonged to the society received monetary support in case of sickness. When a member fell seriously ill, two of her club sisters stayed at her bedside until she was out of danger—or until all the ritual obligations that applied to the care of a dead body had been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, all members had to participate in sewing the shrouds of a deceased member, and ten women who were selected by lottery would accompany the coffin to the cemetery. The Jewish women’s voluntary society of Grünstadt thus offered comprehensive services in sickness and death to its members. Additionally, however, the association dispensed charity to needy men and women of the Jewish community at large, even though the founding document of the Grünstadt Jewish women’s society
declared mutual support in sickness to be the purpose of the society. In fact in some years, the sum of the club’s charitable expenses exceeded the amount the society spent for sick benefits.21

The Grüнстadt Jewish women’s society had its model in a parallel men’s association, founded nine years before the women’s organization. Although the male society carried the name Wohltätigkeitverein (Charity Association) and it most likely dispensed charity as the women’s association did, its statutes also claimed that the society aimed primarily to provide sick benefits for its members. The male Wohltätigkeitverein, however, distinguished itself from the women’s society. First of all, the benefits that the Wohltätigkeitverein offered to its members included standard payments during the week of shivah; if needed, the association also covered burial costs. Secondly, the men explicitly took it upon themselves to perform the religiously prescribed rites for deceased members and, according to the statutes of the Wohltätigkeitverein, all the members would attend the funeral of a former fellow. Most important, however, members of the Wohltätigkeitverein not only held prayer services in the house of the deceased during the seven-day period of mourning, but also gathered at the evening of Shavuot and at Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Sukkot.22

By fulfilling the commandments of rabbinic Judaism, the Wohltätigkeitverein appears to have adhered to the established customs of early modern male hevrot. Yet at meetings on the evening of Shavuot and at Hoshana Rabbah, the men of the Grüнстadt voluntary association did not actively study religious texts, as had been the practice for centuries. Rather, they listened to readings from the Bible, probably in German. In a similar vein, members of the Wohltätigkeitverein refrained from studying Mishnah in the house of a deceased colleague.23 By performing burial rites, holding prayer services, and meeting at customary times such as Shavuot, the Wohltätigkeitverein thus held on to certain functions of early modern hevrot. However, the association had abandoned religious study and had adopted new practices of a mutual-aid society.

In contrast to their male counterparts, members of Grüнстadt’s Jewish women’s society did not engage in communal prayer services. Yet in other features, the female association largely paralleled the male society. Both understood themselves to be sick-benefit societies, both disbursed charity to other Jews in the community, and, in the middle of the nineteenth-century, both stood together at the center of Jewish associational life in the town of Grüнстadt.

As these examples illustrate, in nineteenth-century Germany, women founded sick-care and sick-benefit societies after the model of parallel male associations. This type of men’s and women’s associations indeed constituted the most common kind of modern Jewish associations that emerged
in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Deriving from burial societies, these Jewish voluntary societies often still attended to the burial needs of their members decades after they had been founded and fulfilled a range of other functions. Yet the practices surrounding death and sickness changed. Jewish men came to neglect prayer and religious study, as mutual-aid functions of Jewish associations and financial benefits gained importance. This development opened the door to the rise of Jewish women’s voluntary societies, in which Enlightenment and bourgeois values predominated.

In 1823, a group of Jewish women in Emmendingen (a town in Baden) created a voluntary society and in the founding document of their association laid out the ideology that sustained modern Jewish voluntary associations. The preamble of the statutes of the Emmendingen women’s sick-care society *Hevrat Ezrat Nashim* (Association for the Help of Women) reads as follows:

Among all the duties incumbent on humanity, *Menschenliebe* [love of humanity] stands out as the first and holiest duty. Only a good and feeling heart is capable of true *Menschenliebe*, and a good heart encompasses all other virtues, too. . . . Rightly thus, that famous rabbi considered *Nächstenliebe* [the love for our fellow] as the fundamental law from which all sacred religious laws derive.

With these statements, the Jewish women of Emmendingen reversed the value system of rabbinic Judaism that had stood at the core of pre-modern Jewish associational life. According to their statutes, the Enlightenment concept of brotherly love formed the highest of all duties, and the performance of all other divine commandments or *mitzvot* appears not to have carried the same weight. In their view, the loving relationships among humans take precedence over the relationship of the community toward God. This train of thought is pursued, as the statutes hold that “a good heart” forms the foundation of all virtues. In rabbinic Judaism, Talmud Torah and the fulfillment of ritual obligations represented the key to virtue and constituted virtue. The women of Emmendingen, however, embraced a more universal concept of morality, in which emotional receptivity and tender sentiments lead to virtue. Indeed, the statutes of the *Hevrat Ezrat Nashim* state that “Nächstenliebe,” the love for our fellow, rather than emanating from religious beliefs and practices, constituted the very basis of Judaism, “the fundamental law from which all sacred religious laws derive.”

In the founding statutes of the *Hevrat Ezrat Nashim*, the Jewish women of Emmendingen thus expressed some of the fundamental tenets of the Haskalah, according to which human relationships and emotional sensitivity ranked higher than religious dogma. To lessen the plight of the sick, to
recover them for humanity, constituted a sacred endeavor for these women, in which tenderness of the heart, civic duty, and self-improvement converged. In mutual-aid societies such as Hevrat Ezerat Nashim, Jewish men and Jewish women embraced nineteenth-century concepts of Jewish religiosity and a bourgeois worldview. For women as well as men, self-help and philanthropy in Jewish associations served as a means of integrating into German society, of socially and culturally uplifting themselves and the Jewish community, and of expressing Jewishness in a modern framework.

**JEWISH WOMEN’S ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR NON-JEWISH COUNTERPARTS**

Jewish men and Jewish women pursued and expressed their integration into German middle-class society by founding and running mutual-aid and charitable voluntary associations. Thus, Jewish men’s mutual-aid societies such as death-benefit and sick-benefit associations and other male benevolent societies possessed numerous non-Jewish models and equivalents. Likewise, in the middle of the nineteenth century, networks of Jewish and non-Jewish women’s benevolent societies existed alongside each other. Yet the emergence and the development of Jewish women’s associations had their own dynamics, and in erecting and directing independent female voluntary associations, Jewish women did not always or primarily emulate their Christian neighbors. In Cassel, for instance, a Jewish women’s society predated a comparable non-Jewish institution. In 1811, when Cassel belonged to the Napoleonic Kingdom of Westphalia, Jeanette Wallach, Gutheil Benary, and seventy-two other married women established the Israelitische Frauen-Verein (Israelite Women’s Association). They created the association after the model of the Jewish men’s sick-care society of Cassel, the Israelitische Krankenpflegeverein (Israelite Sick-Care Association), founded in 1773. Similar to the Israelitische Krankenpflegeverein, the Israelitische Frauen-Verein provided care, material and financial support, as well as medical attention to the local poor when they fell ill. Christian women in Cassel founded a corresponding association, the Frauenverein für Krankenpflege (Women’s Association for Sick Care), not before 1813, and the non-Jewish society appears to have remained significantly smaller than its Jewish counterpart.

In Hamburg, particularly strong Jewish women’s associations also were founded early on. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, at least three Jewish women’s voluntary societies existed in the city: the Frauenverein zur Unterstützung armer Wocherinnen (Women’s Association for the Support of Poor Women in Childbed; founded in 1814), the Frauenverein zur Unterstützung armer israelitischer Witwen (Women’s Association...
for the Support of Poor Israelite Widows; also founded in 1814), and the
Israelsitische Frauen-Verein zur Bekleidung armer Knaben (Women's Association
for the Clothing of Poor Boys; founded in 1819). Affiliated with the
Reform movement, the Israelitische Frauen-Verein zur Bekleidung armer
Knaben provided clothing for the students of the Jewish Free School.28
While we possess little information about the Frauen-Verein zur Unter-
stützung armer israelitischer Witwen, the statutes of the Frauen-Verein zur
Unterstützung armer Wöchnerinnen describe in detail how the association
came into existence and how it operated. When the inhabitants of Ham-
burg suffered from starvation and destitution under the French occupation
of the city and the existing poor relief system collapsed, compassion for the
lower classes stirred in the hearts of "two tenderly feeling women."29 In par-
ticular, the future philanthropists lamented the misfortune of the unhappy
women who gave birth in the times of hardship. The women vowed to
found a benevolent society to assist their sisters, should their city be liber-
ated from the French "tyranny."30 After the French troops left, the women
established the Frauen-Verein zur Unterstützung armer Wöchnerinnen. This
organization catered exclusively to Jewish women, but it showed no con-
cern for religious practices such as burial rites. Neither were its members in-
volved in visiting women in childbed. Founded, directed, and run by
women, the Frauen-Verein zur Unterstützung armer Wöchnerinnen instead
provided material and financial assistance to women in childbed in a highly
bureaucratic fashion.

In its dedication to the German cause, the Frauen-Verein zur Unter-
stützung armer Wöchnerinnen resembled the numerous German, non-Jew-
ish patriotic women's associations that emerged during the Napoleonic
Wars. In Hamburg, the Hamburgische Frauen-Verein (Hamburg Women's
Association) supported the national cause with charitable activities during the
years of political crisis and material deprivation. Yet the fact that Jewish
women of Hamburg created not less than three women's associations in
this period is noteworthy, and moreover, all three Jewish voluntary societies
pursued their philanthropic enterprises for decades. Almost one hundred
years later, in the twentieth century, these associations still played a signifi-
cant role in the communal welfare system of Hamburg Jewry. This long-
term commitment was characteristic for Jewish women's associations but
was uncommon for non-Jewish patriotic women's associations of the Na-
poleonic Wars, which typically dissolved when peace was restored. Only in
the 1830s did the formation of associations for German, non-Jewish wom-
en regain momentum, with non-Jewish women creating permanent net-
works of benevolent societies.31

The rise of Jewish women's associations did not follow this pattern. The
network of Jewish women's voluntary societies expanded steadily through-
out German lands, and this continuity may have contributed to the strength of female leadership in Jewish women's voluntary societies. Women had directed most non-Jewish patriotic women's associations independently, and only some of these voluntary societies had used men as bookkeepers or secretaries. However, in many later non-Jewish women's benevolent associations, men were involved in leading the associations or in controlling their activities.32

Up to 1870, conversely, Jewish women continued to lead the overwhelming majority of their female voluntary societies without male interference and only occasionally enlisted the help of the men in their communities. In Emmendingen in 1823, for instance, a male clerk kept the books under the supervision of the female directors. In other towns, in the second half of the nineteenth century, male secretaries took minutes at meetings and handled the correspondence of the women's associations, while members of all-female boards carried out the bookkeeping themselves. In fact, the records of women's societies in some Jewish communities, including Neuwied in the Rhineland, Ottensoos in Franconia, Lübeck, Mainz, and Würzburg show no trace of male involvement at all.33 In larger cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt, Vienna, and Breslau, men sometimes gained influence in Jewish women's associations and, as a tendency, men increasingly held seats along with women on the boards of female voluntary societies.34 Yet overall, Jewish women were more likely than their non-Jewish counterparts to administer their voluntary societies autonomously, well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

Thus, Jewish women's associations distinguished themselves from non-Jewish female voluntary societies, even though Jewish associations expressed and promoted Jewish integration into German middle-class society. The development and in particular the emergence of Jewish women's associations followed its own path. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Jewish women ran independent women's associations in not less than thirteen urban and rural German Jewish communities, whereas non-Jewish equivalents seem not to have existed in comparable numbers.35 Inner-Jewish dynamics appear to have led to these novel forms of women's participation in the sphere of Jewish voluntary societies. In their desire for upward mobility and their fight against poverty and marginality, Jewish men and women eagerly established benevolent societies. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that Hebrew prayer and religious study ceased to define Jewish associational life created new openings for Jewish women and facilitated the emergence and the uninterrupted rise of Jewish women's associations in nineteenth-century Germany. Whether the origins of Jewish women's benevolent societies in other European countries and particularly in Eastern Europe likewise can be traced to a decline of the male culture of
Talmud Torah remains to be investigated. In Germany the phenomena were related.

FROM RELIGIOUS STUDY AND DAILY PRAYER TO THE BUSINESS OF YAHRZEIT BENEFITS

German Jews not only tended to abandon religious practices within their voluntary societies, but also transformed the religious culture of Jewish associational life. This process mitigated the exclusion of women from the world of Jewish religiosity. Women had greater access to the religious practices that moved to the foreground in nineteenth-century Jewish voluntary societies than they had had to the culture of male piety that had shaped early modern associational life. Women had for centuries sewn shrouds and performed the rituals that Jewish law prescribed for female corpses. Nevertheless, barred from communal study of rabbinic texts and from halakhically defined prayer circles, women had played a secondary role in the culture of death, as Jews had cultivated it in pre-modern hevrot. This situation changed in the nineteenth century, when German Jews adapted customs surrounding death to modern sensibilities and needs. Jewish women’s associations and Jewish men’s voluntary societies began to fulfill similar religious functions.

Members of the Israelitische Frauenkrankenkasse in Frankfurt, which we know already as a large, mid-eighteenth-century Jewish women’s sick-benefit association, may never have performed burial rites. However, according to the statutes of the society from 1820, the Israelitische Frauenkrankenkasse arranged prayer services for members during the seven days of mourning, after they died. And in 1836, the by-laws of the association featured an entire novel set of regulations. For a fee, the society offered to arrange seven days of prayer services on behalf of individuals who had not been members of the women’s association. Moreover, for contributions ranging from 3.5 to 142 times the amount of a yearly membership, the Israelitische Frauenkrankenkasse committed itself to honor the death of members and non-members with a variety of services. The association created the option of having daily prayer services held for a period of thirty days or even for eleven months after someone’s demise, and it offered to have the yahrzeit of a deceased person observed with acts such as the lighting of an oil lamp, the celebration of prayer services, and the reading of a text from the Mishnah by ten men. Thus, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Israelitische Frauenkrankenkasse sold prayer services and study sessions that the female members of the association did not hold themselves. Rather, the voluntary society hired men to perform these ceremonies. With this prac-
Since the *Israelitische Frauenkrankenkasse* did not stand alone. As early as 1820, the men’s *Israelitische Kranken-Kasse* (Israelite Sick Fund) of nearby Offenbach also offered religious study sessions and prayer services for sale and then paid Jewish men to recite from the Mishnah and to hold services. By the end of the nineteenth century, the selling of religious services had become a common feature in the statutes of modern Jewish institutions. In fact, Jewish voluntary societies founded hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly and the poor, and then required the male inmates of these institutes to observe *yahrzeit* rituals for donors as well as for the members of the societies that ran the institutions. As a relatively early example of this practice, the 1838 statutes of the Jewish boys’ orphanage in Hamburg stipulated that major donors were entitled to *yahrzeit* prayers by adolescent inmates. Orphanages in Stettin and Paderborn, founded in the 1850s, honored donors in similar ways, and indeed, gratuities for *yahrzeit* services and for commemorating benefactors and members of benevolent associations could develop into a substantial source of income for modern Jewish welfare institutions.37

The statutes of eighteenth-century burial, sick-care, or study societies, such as the *Israelitische Kranken-Verpflegungs-Anstalt und Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft* in Breslau, do not appear to refer to *yahrzeit* observances.38 In fact, a *hevrah* that formed a regular prayer quorum did not require any specific regulation for this purpose. As an element of synagogue liturgy, the recital of the mourners’ *kaddish* constitutes an integral part of Jewish worship. And in the pre-modern setting, when a male Jewish voluntary society did not fulfill the functions of a full-fledged worship community, its members frequented other synagogues that were not affiliated with the *hevrah*, for daily prayers. There, the male worshippers recited the mourners’ *kaddish* when it was called for. Yet in the nineteenth century, Jewish men came to neglect practices of communal prayer, and the synagogues that voluntary associations erected on the premises of orphanages, hospitals, and other Jewish welfare institution gained new significance. As residents could be made responsible for holding daily prayer services, these synagogues developed into sites of commemoration for members and benefactors of the voluntary association that operated the Jewish welfare institution. Associations also sold the privilege of being commemorated by inmates of Jewish hospitals, orphanages, or homes for the elderly to any Jew who preferred not to rely on his or her male descendants for the observance of their *yahrzeit*.

Voluntary societies that did not run Jewish welfare institutions entered the business of selling *yahrzeit* benefits to non-members only sporadically. Even male societies with their own synagogue, such as the Breslau sick-benefit association *Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Guten* (Society for the
Promotion of the Good), observed only the yahrzeit of their members—without charging for it. In 1858, the male Gesellschaft Hachnassath Kallah (dowry society) of Berlin, however, whose members did not engage in communal prayer, burial rites, or sick visits, assumed responsibility to provide yahrzeit commemorations for members in exchange for a donation. The bequest had to be large enough that the accruing interest covered the costs for the yahrzeit candle and for hiring men to say the kaddish prayer. 

Stipulations of this type can be found in statutes of men’s as well as of women’s associations and point to the fact that the respective society did not hold regular worship services, occasions at which members would have naturally recited the mourning prayer for a deceased colleague. This, of course, was the case for all Jewish women’s associations. Yet in the course of the nineteenth century, men’s voluntary societies too withdrew from religious practices that previous generations had valued highly, such as the study of Mishnah and communal prayer in a hevnah. The case of the three Jewish voluntary societies in the small town of Ottensoos in Franconia exemplifies how these changes brought nineteenth-century Jewish men’s and women’s associations into a new alignment.

The Israelitische Frauenverein (Israelite Women’s Association) of Ottensoos, founded in 1862, had a membership of twenty women in 1868. The group fulfilled some of the functions of a burial society. Its members guarded the bodies of deceased Jewish women and girls, provided shrouds for poor women, escorted coffins to the cemetery, visited female patients, and disbursed charity. Additionally, the association arranged yahrzeit observances for women who died without male descendants. Members as well as non-members could purchase this service, which included the lighting of a candle, the recitation of the kaddish prayer, and a study session. The 1840 statutes of the male burial society in Ottensoos, the Hevra Kaddisha De-Gemilut Hasadim (Holy Society of Loving-Kindness), as opposed to those of the Israelitischer Frauenverein, made no explicit provisions for yahrzeit commemorations. Founded in 1738, the association still bore features of an early modern hevra kaddisha in 1840. Its members performed all the burials in the Jewish community for a fee, visited sick Jews in town, and handed out charity. Moreover, when a member of the Hevra Kaddisha De-Gemilut Hasadim died, his fellows gathered during the mourning period in the house of the deceased for prayer and study. Yet, instead of studying the Mishnah, they read “religious-moral” texts. It remains unclear, whether the members of Ottensoos’s burial society turned to Hebrew Musar literature or read contemporary German writings. Certainly, however, they did not engage in Talmud Torah in the customary sense.

Members of another Jewish association in Ottensoos likewise adopted a new approach to Jewish learning. In 1842, Jewish men had established a
voluntary society dedicated to the religious education of its members, called *Hevrath Hadashah* (New Society). According to the 1840 statutes of this organization, the men congregated every Sabbath and on fast days for a Bible reading in Hebrew, followed by a German translation. In these religious assemblies, the active participation and lively discussions that had characterized religious study in the pre-modern setting were shunned. Rather, as the statutes stipulated, members of the *Hevrath Hadashah* were to listen to the weekly Bible readings “in pious silence.” Thus, in this modern equivalent to a Talmud Torah society, reformers had not only replaced rabbinic literature with the Bible, but had also introduced middle-class standards of decorum and contemporary ideas of edification. Additionally and in line with the modern character of the association, the *Hevrath Hadashah* provided *yahrzeit* observances for its members. Like women’s associations, the society hired men to study a passage from the Mishnah and to say *kaddish* in the synagogue.

In mid-nineteenth-century Ottensoos, thus, a variety of Jewish voluntary associations coexisted, and some of the practices of these associations resist neat categorization into established customs and innovations. The same is true for other Jewish communities in Germany. In fact, not even differences between urban and rural settings are clear-cut. Traditionalist male burial societies and Talmud Torah worship groups persisted even in urban centers well into the twentieth century, while modern-looking associations sprang up in small communities in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet the overall trend is unmistakable: associations whose religious functions were accessible to both sexes replaced male *hevrot* that were centered on Hebrew prayer and Talmudic study. The statutes of the two Jewish men’s associations in Ottensoos illustrate the transition from the active learning in study sessions to the decorous delivering of religious texts. Other Jewish voluntary societies dropped practices of religious learning or hired men to study Mishnah in the house of a deceased. In fact, German Jews increasingly employed other Jews to perform burial rites and to hold *yahrzeit* services, instead of engaging in these activities themselves. The new status of *yahrzeit* commemorations resulted from Jewish men’s withdrawal from the practice of daily worship, and in the process *yahrzeit* and memorial services came to supersede the practice of studying Mishnah as a mourning rite.

In Germany in the nineteenth century, a significant number of Jewish men’s and women’s associations arranged *yahrzeit* commemorations for their members. As a mourning ritual, study and in particular prayer increasingly assumed the character of a service that could be purchased, rather than an honor and a privilege that Jewish men took on proudly. In a process of professionalizing religious practices, Jewish men began to dele-
gate the performance of religious acts, the exclusive access to which had marked and defined their superior position as men in pre-modern Jewish culture. German-Jewish men became “like women,” as they hired out prayer and study. As opposed to men, women had held auxiliary roles in the early modern Jewish culture of death. Yet now, in their own voluntary societies, they came to perform functions similar to those of their male contemporaries, by arranging prayer and study sessions. By the second half of the century, this equalization of religious roles in Jewish voluntary associations also extended to burial rites.

WOMEN AND BURIAL RITES IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, men’s burial societies constituted standard features in German Jewish communities, while independent female burial societies formed the exception. This did not change significantly in the following decades. Yet women’s associations that combined other areas of benevolence with care for the dead, typically called Israelitischer Frauenverein (Israelite Women’s Association), became common. Before these societies appeared in Jewish communities, women often had performed burial rites for other women outside the structures of voluntary societies. In Stargard (Prussia) in 1817, for instance, the Jewish community hired “the widow Meyer Joseph” as Totenbeerdigungsfrau (burial woman). Under the supervision of the male burial society, Joseph sewed shrouds for the men and women who had died, and she washed and buried the female deceased. Stargard’s Jewish women aided Meyer with shrouds and ablations, and the men of the hevra kaddisha assisted her at the cemetery.44

Similar practices prevailed in other German Jewish communities until the middle of the nineteenth century. With the exception of only a few women’s associations such as the Hevrat Nashim Zadkaniyot (Society of Pious Women), founded in Berlin in 1745, female Jewish voluntary societies tended not to be involved in the washing, dressing, watching or burying of the deceased.45 Thus in many Jewish communities, men operated burial societies, and Jewish women ran other Jewish voluntary associations. The Jewish Frauenverein (Women’s Association) of the small town of Schnaittach in Franconia, for instance, was primarily a sick-care society. Around 1840, the members of the voluntary society visited all ill Jewish women in the town daily, and if they were in need of it, the sick also obtained financial support. In addition, members of the Frauenverein of Schnaittach held night watches for each other when they fell ill, and disbursed money to poor Jews when a member of the association died. Members of the male Jewish benevolent society in Schnaittach, the Chebrat
Gemilath Chasidim (Association for Deeds of Loving-Kindness), also visited each other when sick. However, as opposed to the Frauenverein, the Chebrat Gemilath Chasidim was a prayer and study circle whose members performed burial rites for each other and built coffins for every Jewish funeral in town. In 1839, the men's association changed its name to Hevrat Shokhrei Ha-Tov (Association of the Seekers of the Good) and additionally adopted the German name Wohltätigkeits-Verein (Benevolent Society), but even according to its revised statutes the society still resembled an early modern hevrah. The members of Hevrat Shokhrei Ha-Tov continued to meet regularly for study and prayer, as generations of Jewish men had done before them. The women's society, on the other hand, was a more modern type of benevolent association. Its members neither concerned themselves with burial rites, nor engaged in religious study or prayer.

This pattern according to which Jewish women founded a variety of benevolent associations, while men ran burial societies and prayer circles as well as modern-type benevolent societies, also holds true for larger cities such as Hamburg. In 1670, Jewish men in that city had established a burial society. In the eighteenth century, male Talmud Torah and bikkur holim associations followed, death-benefit coffins and sick-benefit societies appeared, and existing associations expanded their realm of activities. Jewish women's societies emerged in Hamburg in the second decade of the nineteenth century, in the form of welfare societies, while women's involvement in burial rites retained an ambiguous status. In 1841, a female burial society called Hevra Kaddisha Gemilut Hasadim De-Nashim Zadkaniyot (Holy Society of Loving-Kindness of Pious Women) appears to have existed. Yet, as a chronicler of the men's burial society reports, “the women fulfill[ed] their holy duties quietly,” and men stood in the foreground. In 1870, according to this information, the statutes of the male burial society for the first time referred to the existence of a women's organization, which operated as a branch of the male hevra kaddisha. The document lists the name of the women's association now as Hevrat Nashim Zadkaniyot Gemilut Hesed (Pious Women's Society for Loving-Kindness).

For most other Jewish communities in nineteenth-century Germany, evidence of female burial societies is likewise missing or vague. As in Breslau, women who performed burial rites may have often formed “an association within the association” with little formal status and recognition. An exception appears to have been a female hevra kaddisha in Lübeck, called Frauen-Chevrolet-Kedischoh (Women's Holy Society). In Munich, the statutes of the male hevra kaddisha from 1827 note that, in the future, the women of the community may found a society dedicated to the burial needs of the female population. Yet, rather than founding a hevra kaddisha, the Jewish women of Munich established a society called Israelitischer Frauen-
verein in 1830, whose members cared for sick and poor women in the Jewish community and for Jewish women in childbed. Similarly, when the women affiliated with the Breslau hevra kaddisha formally founded their own voluntary society in 1817, this association devoted itself to the support of poor Jewish women in childbed.30

Like Jews in Munich, the members of the male hevra kaddisha in Stettin, which organization had existed since 1822, wished to form a female burial society. In 1847, Rabbi Wolff Aloys Meisel, acting as an honorary member of the hevra kaddisha, invited the Jewish women of the town to a meeting at which the assembled then founded an Israelitische Frauen-Verein. In the following decades, this women’s association operated as a sick-care and burial society. Its members performed burial rites for the female Jewish population of Stettin, sewed shrouds for men and women, and accompanied every funeral cortège. Furthermore, the women of the Israelitische Frauen-Verein cared for poor Jewish women when they were sick and administered services to all female community members who fell dangerously ill. According to its statutes from 1857, the male hevra kaddisha (now called Wohltätigkeits- und Begräbnis-Verein der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Stettin, or Benevolence and Burial Society of the Jewish Community of Stettin) served the poor and the sick male Jewish population in similar ways. Members of the Wohltätigkeits- und Begräbnis-Verein, however, also prayed for the sick and held prayer services in houses of the deceased in addition to performing burial rites, supplying coffins, and accompanying corteges.31 In the 1850s, the Jewish community of Stettin thus possessed a men’s and a women’s society, both devoted to burial rites and sick care. Members of the male association, however, still engaged in communal prayer and the society retained the name Begräbnis-Verein (burial society), while the women’s society was called by the more general term Frauen-Verein (women’s association). Undoubtedly, Jewish women in Stettin had performed burial rites in previous decades, but now their religious and philanthropic engagement found expression in an independent organization.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, women’s associations such as the Stettin Israelitische Frauen-Verein were founded in many Jewish communities throughout Germany. Most of them were known under the generic name Israelitischer Frauenverein, or by the slightly different spelling, Israelitischer Frauen-Verein. Members of these societies carried out a broad range of benevolent activities and commonly took on the responsibility to care for the deceased. Such an Israelitische Frauen-Verein operated in Pyritz, near Stettin, and, as we have seen, from the 1860s on, in Ottensoos, Franconia. In other Jewish communities, we find variations of the same pattern. Members of the Israelitische Frauenverein of Thorn in Posen, for instance, appear not to have performed rites such as the washing of corpses them-
selves, but only arranged for these services in cooperation with the male burial society. The *Israelitische Frauen-Verein* that Bertha Oppenheimer founded as early as 1845 in Leipzig performed burial rites only for poor women, rather than for the entire female Jewish population. The statutes of the *Israelitische Frauen-Verein* in Erfurt from 1857 stand out, as they detail that two male officials (the cantor and communal teacher of religion) guided the women in the execution of burial rites for females. Moreover, we learn that the women’s voluntary society possessed edifying literature in German, geared toward the “female soul [*Gemüt*],” which the association lent to the bereaved during the mourning period. In Neuwied, Rhineland, a women’s society of the same type carried the name *Israelitisher Wohltätiger Frauenverein* (Israelite Benevolent Women’s Association). Members of this association performed burial rituals and sewed shrouds for every deceased Jewish woman in town. Additionally, the *Israelitische Wohltätige Frauenverein* assisted needy and sick Jews as well as poor women in childbed by supporting them financially and by distributing bread, potatoes, and Passover *mazezot*.

In these and numerous other associations that began to emerge in the 1840s, the performance of burial rites by women took on organized form. In earlier Jewish women’s associations, such as the sick-care society *Israelitische Frauenverein* in Cassel from 1811, activities relating to deaths and funerals had played a significantly smaller role. The Cassel *Israelitische Frauenverein* thus had from its inception invited each of its members to sew shrouds when a Jewish woman in Cassel died. However, only in 1846 did the association found a female burial society that operated as a branch of the *Israelitische Frauenverein*. Women had for centuries sewed shrouds and washed and dressed female corpses. Previously, however, men’s rabbinic study and Hebrew prayer had held a supreme position in ceremonies surrounding death, and women’s participation in burial rites had only rarely taken place in female voluntary associations. In mid-nineteenth-century Germany, female burial societies still formed exceptions. But Jewish women now performed burial rites in voluntary associations called *Israelitischer Frauenverein*.

These women’s associations, whose members cared for their deceased colleagues and engaged in other benevolent activities, still formed a common feature of Jewish communal life in the early twentieth century. *Israelitische Frauenvereine* appeared traditional then. However, half a century earlier, they had constituted an innovation.

This analysis of the transformation of Jewish associational life in nineteenth-century Germany indicates that the same restructuring of the gender order of Jewish culture that took place in realms such as synagogue wor-
ship and devotional practices, also accompanied the embourgeoisement of Jewish voluntary associations. Women had held a marginal and inferior position in a society and culture shaped by rabbinic Judaism, and they experienced greater inclusion in bourgeois Jewish culture, where the gap between male and female religious practices narrowed.

Yet, in significant ways, women’s rise to a more visible and integrated place in the world of Jewish voluntary associations fundamentally differed from the developments in other arenas of Jewish religious life. The new forms of female synagogue attendance and young women’s participation in modern programs of religious instruction and in confirmation ceremonies were closely linked to the stress on women’s allegedly high propensity for religiosity and women’s functions as mothers and wives. It often appears as if women’s improved position in nineteenth-century middle-class Judaism resulted from male Jewish leaders’ high regard for the domestic realm as a religious sphere and as a female domain. Indeed, parallels to the feminization of Christian religions in contemporary middle-class societies support this interpretation. In Christian society, the trend toward the increasingly feminine character of religious culture was contingent on the privatization of religion in civil society and its relegation into the domestic, familial realm. In the Jewish equivalent of this scenario, women took on new functions as carriers of religiosity and of Jewishness, as they came to inhabit a universe of middle-class domesticity.

However, when Jewish women founded and directed voluntary societies, they all but retired into the privacy of their homes. In nineteenth-century civil society, voluntary associations formed a center stage of the public and political arena, and the gender order of bourgeois society rested to a significant extent on the concept of women’s exclusion from public spheres. Moreover, women’s entry into the world of Jewish voluntary societies was not facilitated by contemporaries invoking the gender characteristics that bourgeois culture ascribed to the female sex. Indeed, rhetoric lauding women’s gentle or caring nature or their beneficial maternal influence was rare in the founding documents of Jewish women’s associations in the early nineteenth century. Thus, bourgeois notions of women’s moral, religious, and domestic nature played a role when nineteenth-century rabbis and preachers exalted Jewish mothers and promoted women’s synagogue attendance. Yet ideas of women’s particularly high religious sensitivity and their maternal and domestic roles did not constitute a necessary condition for women to move from a marginal to a more central position in nineteenth-century Jewish culture. In Jewish associational life, women achieved greater integration and founded independent voluntary societies not in accordance with, but in contradiction to bourgeois concepts of women’s natural place in the home.
We can therefore conclude that, more than anything else, the decline of halakhic Judaism was the determining factor in the transformation of the gender order of Jewish religious culture in nineteenth-century Germany. When bourgeois values and modern cultural and religious practices competed with and often replaced the norms, values, and practices of halakhic Judaism, the mechanism that had held women at the periphery of Jewish religious life failed. Thus, if the concept of the feminization of religion applies to nineteenth-century Jewish culture, it does not primarily describe a domestic Judaism. Instead, one could characterize bourgeois Judaism as feminized, because Jewish men engaged in activities which—within the reference system of rabbinic Judaism—technically fell into the realm of a woman’s rather than a man’s religious practice. Within the framework of rabbinic culture, when a Jewish man prayed in his native tongue rather than in Hebrew, he at least risked being sneered at for behaving like a woman who was not expected to gain Hebrew literacy. When he hired worshippers to recite halakhically defined mourning prayers, he put himself in the position of a woman who was not able to fulfill this religious obligation herself. Certainly, in pre-modern Jewish society, some Jewish men may have relied on Yiddish-language prayers and may have delegated mourning rituals. Others continued, in the nineteenth century, to study Mishnah and Talmud and to recite Hebrew prayers daily. Nevertheless, when practices such as the arranging of yahrzeit services and concepts such as edification as the primary goal and purpose of synagogue attendance became common for increasingly larger segments of German Jewry, a Jewish culture emerged in which men acted “like women.” Yet these aspects of religious life now were valued highly. They no longer marked the worshipper as inferior, and men and women engaged in them on equal terms.