Jewish Thought Adrift
Schine, Robert S.

Published by Brown Judaic Studies

Schine, Robert S.
Jewish Thought Adrift: Max Wiener.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/74135
Prologue

From Oppeln to Berlin

When Isidor Wiener would arrive in the synagogue of the town of Oppeln on Sabbath morning, he always recited first the customary blessing over the prayer shawl, closing his broad tallit around his face for a moment as he did so, and then joined the worshippers. Years later the young rabbi of the congregation, Leo Baeck, recalled that in those days, in that congregation, this was a sign of a more traditional Jew. The "liberal" Jews, with less ceremony, simply draped the tallit around their shoulders in a fold.\(^1\) Max Wiener, born in Oppeln on April 22, 1882, was one of the four children of Isidor and his wife Amalie.

In the recollection of one of Wiener's contemporaries, the town of Oppeln, in Upper Silesia,\(^2\) was as "gray as the cement which was manufactured in its factories," but it was also a town in which, in modern times, the Jews prospered.\(^3\) Jews had lived there before the fourteenth century.\(^4\) One prominent Jew, Abraham of Oppeln, was martyred there in 1453, during a persecution unleashed by a charge of host desecration. In the middle of the 16\(^{th}\) century the Jews were expelled from the city and its surrounding territories, and do not reappear in the historical record until 1742, when the city was under Prussian rule.

In the two centuries of its modern existence, the Jewish community of Oppeln was at the vanguard of religious reform in Judaism. The struggle to re-

---

\(^1\)Theodore Wiener, interview by author, 26 October 1984, Washington, D.C. Theodore Wiener, Max Wiener's son, was born in 1918 in Stettin, Germany.

\(^2\)Now Opole, Poland.


\(^4\)My account of the history of the Jews in Oppeln is based on the article Leo Baeck wrote in 1904 in JE, s.v. "Oppeln," 9:408-9.
spond to modernity, controversies over ritual reform, the arduous fight to obtain the right of citizenship and, at the same time, to prove oneself worthy of that right, the inveterate tension between *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*, Germandom and Judaism, all reverberated in the collective memory of the Jews of the city of Wiener’s childhood and youth.

It was not far from the city of Breslau, where, in 1838, the Jewish community became embroiled in an acrimonious dispute over the nomination of Abraham Geiger for the post of assistant rabbi, a dispute which pitched the supporters of the Orthodox rabbi, Solomon Tiktin, against the advocates of reform. Geiger was eventually confirmed in the office, and when, in 1842, the Oppeln congregation completed the construction of its own synagogue, Geiger was invited to the city to dedicate it. The invitation indicates that at least the leaders of the Oppeln congregation were in sympathy with the movement toward reform which, in Germany, crystallized under the banner of “Liberal Judaism.”

The second rabbi of the Oppeln congregation, Adolf Wiener (1811-1895), whose tenure spanned four decades, advocated radical reforms. Baeck reports that “it was due to his efforts that the community, the first to use the modern ritual, became the champion of religious progress in Upper Silesia.” Indeed, at his first pulpit, in Posen, Adolf Wiener had aroused such opposition by delivering his German sermons in the synagogue that his services could be conducted only under police protection. He was a resolute opponent of the authority of Talmudic law; at the Rabbinical Assemblies of the 1840’s and 50’s he advocated such changes as the introduction of the organ in the synagogue service, permitting travel on the Sabbath, and the abolition of all the second days of the festivals of the Jewish calendar. One congregant recalls that he even advocated changing the beginning of the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday to coincide with the Christian sabbath. However, he did not impose his will on the community, and his congregants, in turn, esteemed their rabbi. He had the respect of others in Oppeln as well, and was honored by the city on his eightieth birthday.

---


6Not related to the family of Max Wiener. Theodore Wiener, interview by author, Washington, 26 October 1984. Adolf Wiener was rabbi in Oppeln from 1853 to 1895. His grand-daughter, Natalie, married Leo Baeck.

7Leo Baeck, “Oppeln.”

Adolf Wiener was succeeded by Hermann Vogelstein (1870-1942), whose path would cross Max Wiener’s on a few occasions. Vogelstein came to Oppeln in 1895. He belonged to that majority of German rabbis who resolutely opposed Jewish nationalism. It was a stance which he had inherited from his father, Heinemann, rabbi in Stettin. The elder Vogelstein had edited a prayerbook for Liberal congregations from which he expunged all allusions to the messianic yearning for the national restoration of Israel. It was only consistent that the elder Vogelstein also joined in the admonition published by the rabbis of Germany two months before the First Zionist Congress in Basel (1897), demanding that, out of piety and “love of fatherland,” German Jews neither participate in the Congress nor support its goals.

The younger Vogelstein held the Oppeln post for two years, leaving to become rabbi in Königsberg, and later in Breslau. Years later, he and Wiener would have a public argument about Zionism. It was sometime in the early 1920’s, as Wiener’s son recalls, at a meeting of the Keren Hayyesod in Breslau. Wiener was the guest speaker, and Vogelstein, then rabbi of the city, delivered a response which Wiener called a “harangue.” Vogelstein then proceeded to reprimand his “former pupil” for this insult. Erich Bildhauer, Wiener’s cousin and editor of the Breslau Jüdische Zeitung, came to his defense. Hermann Vogelstein would later declare in a rabbinical conference that Judaism “is compatible with any form of nationalism—with the exception of Jewish nationalism.”

Vogelstein’s place was taken by Baeck. It was Baeck’s first pulpit, and he was the first to officiate in a new, larger synagogue. He dedicated it soon after his arrival, built on Wilhelmstal Island, a tranquil island in the Oder River in the center of the town. Wiener was a student in those years at the Royal Catholic Gymnasium in Oppeln, where Baeck gave the Jewish students religious instruction. The encounter with Baeck marked the beginning of an association which would remain close until Wiener fled to America in 1939.

---

9See Max Wiener’s article, “Vogelstein, Heinemann,” JL 5:1219. The prayerbook was adopted in Westphalia and came to be known as The Westphalian Prayerbook—“Das westfälische Gebetbuch.” He also wrote a broadside against Zionism: Der Zionismus, eine Gefahr für die gedeihliche Entwicklung des Judentums (1906).

10Max Wiener, “Vogelstein, Heinemann.” Herzl called the group the “Protestrabbiner.”

11Keren Hayyesod served as a discreet fund-raising arm of the Zionist movement.

12Theodore Wiener described the Keren Hayyesod meeting in a letter to me, September 29, 1988. For the rabbinical conference, see below, Part Two, p. 111.

13Baker, Days of Sorrow and Pain, 29. Baker includes two pictures of the new synagogue, one showing the building consumed by flames during the November Pogrom, 1938, among the photographs following p. 112.
Baeck was a conciliatory presence in the Oppeln community. He had sympathy for the customs of traditional Judaism, which he called the "poetry" of Jewish existence, and which he upheld in his own life. Unlike Vogelstein, he thought that the national aspect of Judaism had to be recognized. In a lecture he gave after World War I, he proclaimed that "Judaism is a unique happening in the history of mankind, a word of the Creator's which may no longer be repeated...Neither the element of religion nor that of peoplehood can be removed from Jewish existence." That is a formulation which Wiener would use as well. When, in 1898, Hermann Vogelstein voted for the resolution protesting the Basel Congress, Baeck cast his vote against it, one of only two to do so. Even though Baeck did not yet consider himself a Zionist, the attempt by older colleagues to brand all dissenters as heretics disturbed him.

Wiener belonged to the third generation of his family to have enjoyed a secular education. When he left his hometown, he followed Baeck's footsteps—perhaps his advice as well—taking up studies in philosophy at the University of Breslau, and rabbinical studies simultaneously at the Jewish-Theological Seminary which Zacharias Frankel had established there one-half century before. He recorded in his *curriculum vitae* that he graduated from the Gymnasium on Easter, 1902; his university transcript shows that he enrolled there on the second of May. As was not unusual for German students, Wiener did not confine himself to a single university. After one year, he sought out the University of Berlin, but returned to Breslau in the autumn of 1904.

At the Breslau University Wiener concentrated on philosophy and psychology. He attended Jacob Freudenthal's lectures on Psychology, General History of Philosophy, on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and his seminars on Aristotle, on whom Freudenthal was an authority. He also attended lectures by

---

17 Quite remarkably, the Archives of the University of Breslau, now Wroclaw, still has Wiener's *Anmeldungs-Buch*. I thank the Director, Dr. Stefan Kubów, for sending me a photocopy.
18 Jacob Freudenthal (1839-1907) first taught at the Samson School in Wolfenbüttel, and from 1864 at the Breslau Seminary. From 1875 he also taught at the University of Breslau. In addition to his works on Aristotle, he also published studies on Jewish Hellenistic philosophy and on Spinoza. *EJ*, s.v. "Freudenthal, Jacob."
Hermann Ebbinghaus in philosophy and psychology, and by Baumgartner in 19th century philosophy and epistemology. He received an introduction to Arabic from Carl Brockelmann, and read Ibn Hīṣāms “Life of Muhammed” with Frankel. He also studied Roman history and French poetry, and attended a course on Darwinism. At the University in Berlin, Wiener had the opportunity to attend lectures by many of the outstanding thinkers and scholars of his time, among them Wilhelm Dilthey.

While at each university, Wiener was pursuing rabbinical studies, in Breslau at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and in Berlin at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, established in 1872. The Lehranstalt had fulfilled a long-standing wish of Abraham Geiger to establish an academy for the Science of Judaism. It is plausible that in this, too, Wiener was heeding the counsel of his mentor Leo BaecK, who once publicly proposed that all rabbinical students, whether enrolled at the Lehranstalt, the Breslau Seminary, or at the Neo-Orthodox Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin, be required to take a semester at the other institutions. In Breslau, he studied Jewish history under Marcus Brann, Graetz’ successor, and Talmud under Saul Horowitz.

19Hermann Ebbinghaus (1850-1909) was known for his advances in experimental psychology, in particular as applied to the study of memory.
20Carl Brockelmann, (b. 1868), philologian of Semitic languages.
21See below, Part One, for his influence on Wiener’s interpretation of the prophets. The Berlin professors and Privadozenten whom Wiener lists from that year are: Barth, Dilthey, Horowitz, Lasson, R. Lehmann, Paulsen, Schmoller, Strack, Stumpf, Thiele, Vierkandt. (Wiener’s Anmeldebuch from the Königliche Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin in AJA, Max Wiener File.) Jacob Barth (1851-1914) taught Semitic philology and Bible exegesis, and was the author of Die Nominalbildung in den Semitischen Sprachen. (EJ, s.v. “Barth, Jacob.”) Horowitz is Josef Horowitz (1874-1931), who taught Oriental Languages at the University of Berlin from 1902-1907. (EJ, s.v. “Horowitz, Josef”) Adolf Lasson (1832-1917, originally Aaron Lazarussohn) was a Hegelian whose work focused on philosophy of law and religion. (EJ, s.v. “Lasson, Adolf.”) Rudolf Lehmann (1855-1927), was Privadozent for philosophy and education; Friedrich Paulsen (1846-1908) likewise taught philosophy and education. Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917) was professor of economics and an advocate of the social welfare state. Hermann Strack (1848-1922) was the professor of oriental languages who was active both in the defense of the Jews against Anti-semitism and in the Protestant mission to convert them. With Paul Billebeck he wrote a commentary to the New Testament based on Rabbinic literature (1922-28). Carl Stumpf (1848-1936) developed a theory of perception and knowledge which he applied to music. Alfred Vierkandt (1867-1953) taught philosophy and sociology. (Der Grosse Brockhaus, 16. Aufl. [Wiesbaden: Brockhaus Verlag, 1952-57]; see the respective articles on each.)
22Baker, 38.
23Saul Horowitz (1859-1921). For a survey of Horowitz’ comprehensive erudition, see the article on him in JL. In the spirit of his predecessor, Israel Lewy, he produced critical editions
Lehranstalt in Berlin, he studied homiletics and midrash under Sigmund Maybaum, liturgy and history under Ismar Elbogen, Bible under A.S. Yahuda, and Talmud and codes under Eduard Baneth.

Just four years after arriving in Breslau, Wiener defended his doctoral dissertation in the Aula Leopoldina of the University, at midday on the last Friday of April, 1906. The dissertation dealt with Fichte's conception of history; Freudenthal was his mentor, and in the curriculum vitae which, following the German university custom, is appended to his dissertation, Wiener includes a special appreciation of his encouragement and support. As was also the custom, he defended a number of theses that day, not all of which bore directly on his dissertation. One had to do with an alleged misinterpretation of Kant by Helmholtz, and the last with the critical approach to the Bible: "Chapters 46-51 of the book of Jeremiah"—they contain the oracles against the nations—"are most certainly not genuine."

Doctorate in hand, Wiener left the Breslau seminary for the Berlin Lehranstalt. Like Baeck before him, he joined many who, in those days, broke away from Breslau for the broad allées of Berlin. But it was not merely the cosmopolitan air of the capital which drew students there from the Breslau Seminary. The Seminary was confining. Many sensed that dispassionate inquiry was not really possible. The critical approach to the Bible was taboo. One former student recalls that a certain religious extremism on the part of some members of the faculty may have contributed to this modest exodus. Wiener joined the exodus and took full advantage of the Berlin University, attending Georg Simmel’s lectures on “Philosophy of Culture,” Hermann Gunkel’s on “Old Testament Theology,” as well as classes in philosophy with Max Frischeisen-Köhler and Ernst Cassirer. At the Lehranstalt he heard Hermann Cohen, whose influence on him would prove to be strong and problematic. In 1907 Wiener was ordained rabbi.

The summer of 1907 was also Leo Baeck’s last in Oppeln. In November he became rabbi of the larger community of Düsseldorf, and saw to it that in the following year Wiener, then twenty-six years old, was engaged as his assistant.
Wiener's main duty was religious instruction for the youth. Like Baeck, he was a scholar-rabbi, and he wrote his first major study while serving as assistant rabbi there. The position was a waystation, however, to a pulpit of his own in Stettin. When Wiener left for his new post in 1912, the board of the Düsseldorf synagogue presented him with a testimonial which speaks of his broad knowledge and conscientious attention to his rabbinic office.

Wiener inherited the Stettin congregation from Heinemann Vogelstein, Hermann's father. The elder Vogelstein died while vacationing in St. Moritz in the summer of 1911, after a tenue in Stettin which had spanned three decades, and had been rife with controversy. The modern Stettin congregation was precisely 100 years old in 1912, and an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe during the 19th century had accelerated its growth. The growing community had spawned factions which clashed over proposals to change the liturgy. Under Vogelstein's predecessor, Abraham Treuenfels (rabbi in Stettin from 1860-79), a Commission on Changes in the Liturgy, over the objections of the Orthodox, deleted the “particularistic”—perhaps even nationalistic?—and thus objectionable reference to the election of Israel “from among all the nations”—מִכָּל הָעָמִים—from the prayerbook, and introduced an organ into the synagogue, as well.

Sometime in the 1860's, a more Orthodox congregation, called the Adaβ-Jisroel-Gemeinde, was founded in Stettin by those dissenting from the reformist tendencies of the main synagogue. Nonetheless, its leaders, in the spirit of communal unity, maintained their membership in the main synagogue as well. But conflicts erupted over the liturgy to be followed in the "great" synagogue. Vogelstein pressed the issue when, in 1897, he petitioned the synagogue board that it either adopt an entirely new prayerbook or allow the full use of "the

---

28The annual report of the Lehranstalt notes his appointment as “Religionslehrer,” BHWJ 26 (1909), 9.
29The focus of Part One of this study.
30Testimonial of April 11, 1912 in AJA, Max Wiener File.
31M. Elk, “Vorwort des Herausgebers” in Jacob Peiser, Die Geschichte der Synagogengemeinde zu Stettin, Ostdeutsche Beiträge aus dem Göttinger Arbeitskreis, vol. 37 (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1965), 11. Rabbi Elk was Max Wiener’s successor in Stettin, until 1935, when he settled in Palestine. The first report sent by the American embassy to the State Department concerning the deportation of German Jews to Poland describes the deportation of the 1200 Jews remaining in Stettin in February, 1940. They included the residents of two old-age homes, some of whom were carried to the railroad station on stretchers. (See Arthur D. Morse, While Six Million Died, A Chronicle of American Apathy [Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1983], 290.)
32Peiser, op. cit., 42.
33Ibid., 99-101, for the history of the Adaβ-Jisroel-Gemeinde.
Joël prayerbook,” the prayerbook which Manuel Joël (1826-90) had edited for the new Breslau synagogue. Eventually the board’s commission adopted Heinemann’s own prayerbook, but in the traditional faction, discontent festered with Vogelstein’s thorough purge of the belief in election, and they lobbied for the restoration of the contested words “from among all the nations.” The commission forfeited doctrinal consistency for communal peace and arrived at a compromise: the phrase would be deleted from all prayers, except for the blessing before the reading from the Torah! Aside from changes in liturgy and custom, one of which allowed cremation and burial in urns, Vogelstein also instituted religious instruction for children “above the age of fourteen” and conducted services especially for the youth of the congregation. While Liberal Judaism flourished in Stettin during Vogelstein’s tenure, membership in the Orthodox Adaf-Jisroel-Gemeinde dwindled. After the First World War it encountered hard times, and by 1920 it was unable to gather the quorum of ten men required for worship.

In the congregation which Wiener inherited rabbis were not empowered to decide on change, but only to propose it. Wiener’s contract with the synagogue also allowed (!) him to argue for his suggestions before the governing bodies of the congregation. The congregation maintained a measure of tranquility between constituents of differing provenance and religious practice simply by allowing diversity. Hence, a multitude of duties are enumerated in Wiener’s contract, reflecting the diverse loyalties of his congregants: he was to preach in the “great synagogue” every Sabbath and holiday, and in the “branch worship service” once a year, a second service which became necessary in the first decades of the century, when the congregation outgrew its synagogue. Wiener was also to furnish responsa on halakhic questions, supervise the kosher butcher, and conduct religious instruction, including the classes for confirmands. These classes were probably those originally instituted by Vogelstein for pupils above the age of fourteen.

The chronicle of the history of the Jews of Stettin makes no mention of great controversy during Wiener’s years. World War I would soon come to pre-occupy all Germans, Jewish and Christian. On Wiener’s initiative, a synagogue newsletter was started during the war, the first issue appearing in November,

---

34Ibid., for prayerbook controversy, 42; burial in urns, 68; youth programs, 43, 53.
35The contract is in the AJA, Max Wiener File.
1916. Wiener wanted to extend the reach of his weekly Sabbath sermon. He edited the newsletter himself, but in July, 1917, was drafted as an army chaplain, assigned a wagon, two horses and a driver, and sent to the front with the troops of the First Army. Thereafter, the modest publication appeared irregularly, carrying articles which Wiener wrote for his congregation from the front. One report, "The Jewish Community at the Front," describes in detail the obstacles he had to surmount to bring any kind of Jewish life to the troops. In June 1919, he published a meditation on the Ten Commandments—perhaps it was a sermon for Shavuot—which bears dramatic witness to the impact of the war on Wiener and to the remorse it evoked in him and his generation.

The analysis is striking. Wiener writes that any peace which does not eradicate the source of the evil, economic greed, will be an illusion. He exhorts his congregants to strive for a genuine community of justice. The war exploded Wiener's confidence in old political orders. He also writes frequently of his worry that a society and economy which war has harnessed and unified for its own destructive purposes might be redirected to peaceful aims only with great difficulty.

In the years after the war, Wiener devoted himself to his rabbinical office and his writing. (In fact, nearly all the actual writing was done by his wife, Toni, who served as her husband's amanuensis throughout his life. Even his corre-

36 Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für die Mitglieder der Synagogengemeinde Stettin. The Library of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, possesses a nearly complete run.
37 Peiser, op. cit., 75.
38 The "Ausweis für den Herrn Dr. Wiener in Stettin zur Ausübung der jüdischen Seelsorge bei der Armee," AJA, Max Wiener File, lists all the equipment and provisions allowed the Feldrabbiner, food and lodging for himself, rations for the horses, and the like.
41 Ibid., 12.
42 "Geist und Uniform," Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt...Stettin, Jahrg. 1, Nr. 4, 25-27.
spondence and drafts of his sermons are written in her graceful script.\textsuperscript{43} Wiener was always seeking to educate his congregants about their heritage; for the lawyers and doctors of Stettin he gave special courses in which he compared contemporary medicine and law with its Talmudic counterpart. One pupil who graduated from the \textit{Gymnasium} in 1927 and had been in Wiener's classes through all his school years except the last, wrote six decades later that he still felt much indebted to Dr. Wiener, particularly in the area of philosophy of religion. In his classes as in his sermons, Wiener never read from notes, and in each class he always resumed at the very point where he had left off at the end of the session before.

Because of our close contact with him, we, his pupils, were able to understand his sermons adequately, sometimes quite well. But he spoke hopelessly high over the heads of the congregation. Very few could understand his exceedingly worthwhile but difficult discourses. When he gave eulogies the congregation was simply lost.\textsuperscript{44}

His first lengthy statement on theological issues belongs to this period.\textsuperscript{45} It was also during this period that he was invited to become rabbi of the city of Mannheim, but declined, and during this period as well that the faculty of the \textit{Hochschule} in Berlin nominated him to become the first Hermann Cohen Professor of Philosophy of Religion. It seems that his candidacy was scuttled by Cohen himself. The chair was an endowment given the Hochschule on the occasion of Cohen's seventieth birthday, but Cohen saw in Wiener, forty years his

\textsuperscript{43}The literary estate is in LBIA, Max Wiener File. Theodore Wiener, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 26 October 1984, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{44}Hans Heinz Altmann, member of the \textit{Vorstand} of the Jewish community of Freiburg i.Br., born 1908 in Stettin, in a letter to me, May 22, 1988:

"Dr. Max Wiener war, fast bis zu meinem Abitur im Jahre 1927, mein Religionslehrer...Ich verdanke ihm sehr viel, besonders auf dem Gebiet der Religionsphilosophie...Er hat seinen Unterricht, wie auch seine Predigten, ohne jedes Manuskript durchgeführt. In den Religionsstunden konnte er an demselben Punkt wieder ansetzen, wo er das letzte Mal aufhörte.


\textsuperscript{45}See below, Part Two, p. 73f.
junior, a philosophical “immaturity” which made him unfit to assume the chair bearing the master’s name.\footnote{For the Mannheim offer: Max Wiener, Fairmont, West Virginia, to William Rosenau, Baltimore, 30 September 1942. AJA Rosenau File. On the endowed Cohen chair, \textit{30. BHWI}, 1912. The documentation for Wiener’s candidacy is a letter of reference on Wiener, dated February 1, 1912, and solicited, apparently by the \textit{Hochschule}, from Cohen himself, “\textit{Zum Vorschlag des Lehrerkollegiums für Dr. Wiener...}” A copy of this document was given to me by Herbert A. Strauss, with whose permission it is published and translated here as an Appendix (pp. 181-183).}

The year 1917, the same year Wiener was drafted into the German army as chaplain, was also the year of the Balfour declaration, a diplomatic breakthrough which charged the Zionist movement with new energy. Wiener, too, emerged from the First World War with a sense of Jewish nationhood which would soon crystallize into a theological outlook that supported Zionist goals.\footnote{See below, Part Two, “The Theological Zionist,” pp. 109-120.}

The year 1926 brought him to Berlin, again following Baek, who was instrumental in arranging for his appointment.\footnote{Alfred Jospe, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 22 April 1985.} He also had the support of Alfred Klee, a Berlin lawyer and leader in the Zionist \textit{Jüdische Volkspartei} (“Jewish People’s Party”), who, at that time, was launching a campaign to win the allegiance particularly of the Liberal Jewish communities, which tended to be indifferent or even hostile to Zionism. He must have seized upon the rare opportunity to bring in a Liberal rabbi whom he knew was sympathetic to his cause.\footnote{On Klee (1875-1943), who fled to Holland and perished in the camp at Westerbork, see \textit{EJ}, s.v. “Klee, Alfred,” 10:1096-7.}

Wiener was installed as rabbi in Berlin on the eve of Shavuot, 1926. To the music of the choir and organ he was led into the Fasanenstraße synagogue, in which every seat was taken.\footnote{“Amtseinführung des Herrn Rabbiners Dr. Max Wiener,” \textit{Gemeindeblatt... Berlin} vol. 16, no. 7 (1926): 145.} Like all of the Berlin rabbis, Wiener was not assigned to a specific synagogue. There were eleven synagogues under the aegis of the Jewish Community of Berlin and its board determined where and when the rabbis preached. Wiener’s contract stipulated only that he would have the duty of preaching in synagogues with an organ, a code for the Liberal synagogues. He preached initially in Fasanenstraße and Lützowstraße, and later in the Prinzregentenstraße synagogue, which had abolished separate seating for men and women. He had reached the pinnacle of his career: to be rabbi in the city which was home to half of Germany’s Jews, and which, as Wiener put it in his first Berlin sermon, was a mirror of the spiritual state of the Jews of Western Europe in general. “Renaissance” and “disintegration,” he said, exist in Berlin...
side by side. To arrest the process of "disintegration," Wiener threw himself into the work of the Berlin community's impressive program in adult education, serving as the director, planning curricula and courses, and organizing, as well, the lecture series sponsored by the Jewish Cultural Union (Jüdischer Kulturbund). He also accepted the assignment of serving as chaplain to the Jewish students at the university. It was the first chaplaincy of its kind, a precursor of the American "Hillel rabbi" and a "brief but imaginative experiment" which was terminated by the rise of National Socialism.

Wiener was not a gregarious rabbi; he was a scholar. While the Berlin system itself compelled each of its rabbis to be something of an itinerant preacher, acquainted with several congregations and intimate with none, Wiener's scholarly reclusiveness only isolated him more. Just as in Stettin, his sermons were philosophical discourses. One younger colleague with an appreciation of his keen intellect would seek out the synagogue where Wiener was preaching on a particular sabbath just for that reason. His sermons were not intended to make his co-religionists comfortable, but to challenge them.

Wiener's sermon on the evening of his installation conveyed the message to the curious listeners that the newcomer was a Liberal rabbi of a different hue. One of those present wrote about that evening in a tribute to Wiener after his death:

It was probably one of the strangest sermons I ever heard in my long career. Its effect was neither inspiring nor captivating. A scholar stood there, and his profound line of reasoning could not be followed by every Jew. We were astounded by the frankness, by the unusual boldness with which Wiener sought to raise the congregation to his plane of discourse...Fitting sentence to sentence, in this three-quarter hour long sermon he erected a monumental edifice of Jewish philosophy.

The laconic summary of Wiener's sermon which was published at the time in the official organ of the community gives slight clue to its content. Wiener took the festival of the giving of the law as an occasion to stress the character of revela-

---

53 Jospe, who was Wiener's junior colleague in the Berlin rabbinate, even complained from his pulpit in the Levetzowstraße synagogue, "Ich soll ein Seelsorger sein, aber ich kenne kaum eine einzige Seele hier." Ibid., 52.
tion as commandment. The central message of the festival of revelation, he said, is the “Thou shalt.” The commandments are law, and they point to the divine law-giver. We Jews are obliged to live as Jews, not to heed the voices of others which beckon, “Become like us!” In a veiled fashion, he also expressed his sympathy with the Zionist movement, concluding with an exhortation to his listeners to support all constructive efforts in modern Judaism, whatever they may be. Wiener was stating his position. In that sermon he became, as the listener recalled, “his own commentator,” defining himself as a Liberal rabbi who was different.