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*Storm in the community. Yiddish Polemical Pamphlets of Amsterdam Jewry, 1797-1798.* Selected, translated and introduced by Jozeph Michman and Marion Aptroot. Cincinnati, Oh.: Hebrew Union College Press, 2002. ISBN 0-87820-220-X. Pp. 527.

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The Eighteenth century witnessed a series of sustained efforts made by various ethnic, cultural and religious communities in Western Europe towards Modernization. Within the broader context of the Enlightenment, the movement of Jewish emancipation is known as *haskalah*. While the richness and complexity of the Jewish Enlightenment processes are all-embracing (cultural, political, social, economical) one of the most interesting and—so far—less studied phenomenon is the creation of a new communitarian public sphere through the emergency of a series of short-lived periodical publications aimed at Jewish congregations.

It is to this new and very dynamic public sphere, that was part and parcel of the “Jewish Age of Emancipation” in Central Europe (1780-1880), that belongs the “battle of the pamphlets” from which massive extracts are published now under the title *Storm in the Community*, edited by Joseph Michman and Marion Aptroot. The collection is important for many reasons: not only does it illustrate the vivid richness of the *haskalah* ideology in general, as well as of its Dutch trend in particular, but it also shows its resilience and diversity as a code-switching discourse and as a vivid contribution to the social and cultural debates of the time.

Politically, the pamphlets in this collection are first and foremost an expression of the revolutionary moment that marked the end of the Eighteenth century in the Republic of Netherlands. The “Discourses” were published in the electoral context of the new constitutional debates that mark the evolution towards the full politicization of the *haskalah* (a process already described by David Sorkin in *Orphans of Knowledge* [Valentin Mitchell, 2000] in the case of Berlin Judaism in Germany). Here they follow the moment of civic emancipation. In this respect, the Dutch pamphlets are similar to the “*Beschreibung/Zeitung*” published in mixed Yiddish and German, in Metz, by Abraham Spire. A publication that aimed to offer its readers the possibility to follow the proceedings in the National Assembly, particularly those related to the recognition of civic rights for the Jews. Since in the Netherlands Jewish periodical publications, addressed to the masses, started to appear as early as the end of the Seventeenth century, when they were represented by the first newsletters in Yiddish (*Dinstagishe Kurant* and *Fraytagishe Kurant*), the twin series of “Discourses” are in fact a part of an older tradition. However, it is highly significant that within this already established tradition these publications were issued as a propaganda and polemic tool in the days of the revolutionary turmoil that gripped Western Europe in the aftermath of the French

revolution. As such, they can be seen as a particularly powerful attempt to define the Amsterdam Jewry in terms of a modernizing collective identity, along the battle-lines of the opposition between old and new, tradition and change, inclusion and separation. Strictly speaking though, they seem to express less a desire of adjustment and acculturation and more an attempt to bring the Amsterdam Jewry to the same level of communitarian discourse of debate and instruction shared by their Gentile neighbours.

The volume under discussion contains quite a sizeable selection from the twin series of pamphlets published in Yiddish in Amsterdam in 1797 and 1798 under the common title *Diskurs* (Discourse). The politics of change and reform in the beginning of the emancipation age are shown to include a wide range of topics that bring together issues of congregational practice and political participation in the making of the modern republican state, with an unusually strong element of social criticism directed to the oligarchic leaders of the "old community". These texts then fully express the complexity of the problems faced by the Dutch Jewry in the aftermath of their civic emancipation of 1796 and in preparation for the coming elections. One particularly remarkable instance, for example, is the discussion in which the three characters (Yankev, Anshel and Gumpel) chat about their participation in the electoral process on the day of Tisha Be-Av. Symptomatically, they have to choose between synagogue and ballot-box, between their duty of taking part in the religious service and the civic requirements imposed by the new political structures of the Batavian Republic (72-78). If we compound this circumstance with the fact that Tisha Be-Av just happens to commemorate the destruction of the Temple and the calamity of the Diasporic dispersion, it becomes quite clear that, as the emancipation movements evolved, the social and political symbolism concerned by change and reconstruction became ever more complex and dynamic.

It is this rich and vibrant transformation that is illustrated to a remarkable degree in the strength and width by the Amsterdam serial publications. The many faces of the emancipation and integration processes are displayed in a lively conversational structure that is both public and semi-private, because it develops a typology that is a simplified representation of the positions taken within the Jewish Ashkenazi congregations in terms of religious and political attitudes to liberal politics. Not only is the Amsterdam *haskalah* shown here in all its paradoxical intricacy, but it is also represented in its finest efforts to apply the lessons of the French Revolution to its own development. These efforts can indeed go quite far. For example, the readers are even offered a Jewish version of the "Marseillaise" ("Come all ye members of the Jewish community/See what holiday it is today, etc...."), as well as a reformulated statement of the main liberal civic principle: "The Church is separate from the State, but not the State from the Church"! In the Amsterdam situation, the last statement meant that the community politics associated with the "*alte kille*" (the "old community") and its corrupt board members is to be subjected to government interventions and revolutionary renewal.

In exploiting the comic possibilities of the dialogue format in a serial periodical context, the Amsterdam publications offer an interesting, yet quite entertaining, image of the Jewish congregational life in its cultural and economic fragmentation. As mentioned, it is an image that allows for a strong element of social and religious criticism, along lines of ideological division that are quite specific.

The questions discussed relate to the social, economic and political life of the community but are, nevertheless, linked to and couched in terms of religious observance. The religious face of the Jewish emancipation is thus shown to be an important aspect of the community's public sphere—and indeed suggests the possibility for a new differentiation of the public space along congregational lines. This is an important demarcation because, in my opinion, it is able to support a further conceptual differentiation of the all too familiar model of the public sphere (classically described by J. Habermas), into a better defined notion of religious public space, with a subsequent representing discourse of ideology including both dialogues and controversies.

In terms of comparative understanding, the texts selected in *Storm in the Community* are also important since they show how much Amsterdam Judaism had developed a transitional space of historical development of its own, and thus constitutes a welcome addition to the growing area of research on Enlightenment. While deeply influenced and aligned with the French drive towards the recognition of the Jewish civic rights, it also clearly evolved on a parallel line with the similar phenomena in Germany.

The present state of research, centred on the question of the plurality of models by which Modernity was reached by different groups in Judaism, is currently fast advancing, thus bringing to the understanding of our own intellectual world a much needed historical depth. Both editors, Jozeph Michman and Marion Aptroot are well known scholars of the Dutch *haskalah*, although they belong to different generations and advocate slightly different models for the actual mechanics of the Jewish emancipation. Their introductory presentation of the bilingual edition of the pamphlets is helpful and clear. It includes a competent examination of the Dutch cultural and political context, followed by an informative, yet concise, discussion of the main topics that situate the publications in the history of the European press. The importance of the volume cannot be exaggerated: it marks a turning point in the continuous renewal and redefinition of the culture of Jewish Studies, a discipline itself produced by the ideology of the *haskala*. The book is of significant use to all those interested in the study of Modernity, who teach the history of religious ideas or are concerned by the evolution of the religious and congregational public space as represented by the social discourse of the media.