

**Lucia J. Linares, German Politics and the »Jewish Question«, 1914–1919, Stuttgart (Franz Steiner Verlag) 2021, 233 p. (Weimarer Schriften zur Republik, 15), ISBN 978-3-515-13069-1, EUR 47,00.**

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par  
**Eric Kurlander, DeLand, FL**

Despite the ubiquity of the »Jewish Question« in German history, few historians have examined the topic independently of the Nazi »Final Solution«. In this fascinating new book, Lucia Linares highlights, to the contrary, »the contingency of the term, the manifold agents that appropriated it, its various meanings and how it functioned« (p. 19), focusing on »the ways in which questions about German-Jewish citizenship ... shaped the politics« of late Imperial and early Weimar Germany. The argument is carried out through five thematic chapters. The first and longest chapter traces the »genealogy of the Jewish Question« from its prominent mention in Bruno Bauer's »Die Judenfrage« (1842) to Heinrich von Treitschke's fraught 1879 essay, »Our Prospects«, which generated the famous Berlin Antisemitic Controversy, to Moritz Goldstein's equally controversial 1912 article, »The German-Jewish Parnassus«. Throughout the chapter, Linares shows how the »Jewish Question« became increasingly central to discussions of emancipation and assimilation, race and religion, Zionism and German nationalism, while never losing the reform-minded – if at times also antisemitic – tone introduced by Bauer in the 1840s. »The most significant common thread throughout the debates«, the author observes, is that the »Jewish Question« became »symptomatic of ... the need for political and national-cultural reform« and the nation-state's »confrontation with modernization« (p. 76).

Chapter Two focuses on the »Jewish Question« in the context of wartime Germany's »eastern policy«. Beginning with Max Bodenheimer's 1902 »Denkschrift« on building a Jewish-led, Germanophone *Zwischenreich* in East-Central Europe, the chapter then delves into efforts during the First World War to convince the highest ranks of the German civilian and military establishment to take Bodenheimer's ideas seriously. The policy of employing »Eastern European Jews as mediators of German interests« ultimately failed, of course, due not only to the opposition of Congress Poland, but also to Germany's increasingly bleak military prospects and the pro-Zionist Balfour Declaration. Neither did Germany's diminishing military prospects after 1916 prevent the German-Jewish intellectual, Richard Lichtheim, from advocating for a similar kind of German-Jewish collaboration – and Jewish settlement – in the Middle East. Here too the reticence of Germany's Ottoman ally, and Britain's growing support for Zionism ensured that Lichtheim's plans got tabled. The seriousness with which German authorities took these discussions cannot be dismissed, however, as leading Zionists »gained unprecedented political representation in 1918 when the German Foreign ministry



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

established a Jewish Affairs section«, indicating, in the words of Francis Nicosia, that »World Jewry« was now recognized as »an important protagonist in international relations« (p. 81).

Turning from foreign to domestic policy, Chapter Three constitutes a detailed analysis of »Constitutionalism and secularism in the Jewish census (*Judenzählung*) of 1916«. While acknowledging the antisemitic assumptions undergirding the German military's demand for an accounting of Jewish participation in the armed forces, Linares simultaneously shows how debates around the »Jew count« initiated broader discussions, from the left to the right, regarding the universality of the German *Rechtsstaat*, crystallizing »a discourse on equality before the law, religious tolerance and unity in the German Empire« (p. 138). Nor did questions about the role of the Jews in the First World War disappear after 1918, as we learn in Chapter Four (»Article 113 leads into the deepest questions of the concept of nationality: minority rights in the Weimar constitution«). Here Linares contrasts the universalist conception of the nation-state enshrined in the Weimar Constitution by its architect, the German-Jewish liberal Hugo Preuss, who believed that language was the primary determinant of nationality, with the more ethnocultural understanding of Jewish nationality proposed by the Zionist Socialist, Oskar Cohn. Despite growing pressure from both the Zionist left and *völkisch* right for Cohn's conception of Jewish (and German) citizenship, Preuss's linguistic understanding won out, producing the legal paradox that German Jews »were not recognized as minorities« by the Weimar Constitution even while Jews were recognized as a »distinct minority group deserving of cultural autonomy and rights« in the Minorities Treaties produced at Versailles (p. 164).

The final chapter pursues this paradox by examining the »differing minority existence for Jews in Germany (who did not want to be considered a nation) and Germans in new states (who did)« (p. 166). Even the German-Jewish delegates at Versailles did much to propagate this double standard, citing »violence against Jews as an instrument to demand that minority guarantees be enforced in the »new state« of Poland, thus also ensuring protection for German minority populations« (p. 187). Hence the German delegation emerged as the chief defender of minority rights »for all those »ethnic minorities who felt disadvantaged by the peace treaties and the selective implementation of national self-determination«, with »German and Jewish lobby groups« working »together in the European Congress of Nationalities to ensure the League of Nation was fulfilling its obligations toward protecting minorities« (p. 198). Unfortunately, this mutual German/German-Jewish preoccupation with denying Jewish minority status at home and protecting German minority rights abroad meant that no »specific provisions were included in the Treaty of Versailles referring to the protection of minorities within Germany«, an »omission« which only increased the likelihood of »violent repercussions« (p. 205) after 1933.

19.-21. Jahrhundert – Histoire contemporaine

DOI:  
[10.11588/frrec.2022.2.89235](https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2022.2.89235)

Seite | page 2



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Avoiding a teleological reading of events, Linares nonetheless reminds us of the success of the Weimar Constitution »in the removal of political discriminations against Jews and the beginning of a Jewish renaissance in German society« (p. 207), which could not have occurred without the centrality of the »Jewish Question« in defining discussions regarding democracy, rights, and citizenship. In conclusion, Linares draws a political cultural connection between these historical debates over the »Jewish Question« and contemporary debates over so-called *Leitkultur* in the Federal Republic, namely whether Germanness should be defined ethno-culturally or primarily linguistically. Recent decisions to revise the 1913 *jus sanguinis* Reich Citizenship Law to introduce a *jus solis* path to citizenship and admit one million Syrian refugees appear to signal a more inclusive answer to that question. But the continued success of the AfD and other nativist forces likewise suggests that the ideological tensions and legal contradictions that defined late Wilhelmine and early Weimar discussions of the »Jewish Question« have yet to be resolved.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)