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Review of Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War*

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Michael Berkowitz. *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Paperback edition: Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Pp. xviii, 255. Cloth \$54.95, Paper \$16.95.

In this elegantly written and nicely designed book, Michael Berkowitz offers the reader a fascinating discussion of Zionism as a cultural phenomenon among the assimilated Jews of western and central Europe in the two decades preceding World War I. Berkowitz is particularly interested in how the Zionist movement employed political symbols, myths, and icons in an effort to spawn a new Jewish national consciousness to which assimilated bourgeois Jews in France, Britain, and Germany could safely subscribe without compromising their allegiance to the country of their citizenship. In contrast to the masses of Russian-Polish and Rumanian Jews, for whom migration to Palestine made practical sense as an escape from official anti-Semitism and increasingly frequent pogroms, the Jews of West-Central Europe desired, by and large, to remain where they lived. For them, Zionism was not merely an opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with their less fortunate eastern cousins, but was also an outlet for manifesting a revised notion of Jewishness that contravened many of the dominant stereotypes held by non-Jews and Jews alike. Berkowitz's examination of how the Zionist movement constructed this "Zionist culture" situates Zionism in its *fin-de-siècle* context by elucidating its connections with prevailing notions of nationalism, cultural authenticity, and masculinity. While the

book has obvious import to scholars and students of Jewish history, its historicization of Zionism as a European cultural phenomenon should excite interest among a broad spectrum of historians and cultural studies scholars.

Readers with German studies interests should find the book especially useful. Many of the study's central figures, including Theodore Herzl, Max Nordau, and Martin Buber, were German-speaking Jews whose central European sensibilities profoundly influenced the program, rhetoric, and symbolism of the Zionist movement. The German language itself, which predominated at the Zionist congresses and was used in instruction at an important Jewish educational institution in Palestine, became the focus of intense controversy because its continued use retarded the development of modern Hebrew, a more authentically Jewish language. Zionist literature published by the Jüdischer Verlag, which Buber founded in 1902, proved to be, in Berkowitz's words, "one of Zionism's more successful cultural creations." Nordau, for his part, is most closely associated with the idea of *Muskeljudentum*. Reacting against the traditional image of the sickly, intellectual Jewish male, Nordau wanted Zionism to create "new Jewish men" who were athletic, strong, and vigorous. Although Berkowitz is not the first scholar to examine the phenomenon of "muscular Jewry" or to point out that such conceptions of "masculinity" were an important feature of the culture of the Kaiserreich, he is especially effective in showing how this tendency was integrated into Zionist self-representations. Berkowitz makes particularly skillful use of visual representations disseminated by Zionist organizations in pamphlets and on postcards and stamps.

This book exemplifies the potential of the "new" cultural history, when it is done well. Berkowitz analyzes visual representations but does not see what is obviously not there. He makes an argument for the importance of rhetoric and representation but avoids a reductivist interpretation that privileges such factors over all others. And, perhaps most refreshingly of all, he avoids jargon.

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