

### Schriftdetail

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### Europäisches Judentum

Ob nun die Namen Mathieu le Juif oder Süskind von Trimberg jeweils für eine geschichtlich belegte Figur stehen oder nicht: beider Dichtung jedenfalls spiegelt die Befindlichkeit eines Teiles der jüdischen Gesellschaft im Europa des Mittelalters wider.

Das Mittelalter ist vielgestaltig, und vielgestaltig ist seine Gesellschaft, die sich nach dem Untergang des römischen Imperiums als Europa neu orientieren muß. An die Stelle zentraler Verwaltung rückt ein Polyzentrismus, über den die damalige Gesellschaft in schwere Krisen gerät. Das Mittelalter verfinstert sich, zumindest aus heutiger Sicht, besonders mit Rückblick auf die Auswirkung jener Krisen der damaligen Zeit, und durch das Bild, das infolge der Beschäftigung mit dieser Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert entworfen wird. Vieles daran wird aus der Distanz einfacher und ästhetisierter gesehen, als es war, und jenes Bild des Mittelalters hat ein unheilvolles Mitbringsel: Antisemitismus, wie sich der Judenhaß nun nennt. Die letzte Konsequenz jener Entwicklung sind die dreißiger und vierziger Jahre unseres Jahrhunderts mit ihrem verunglückten Bild, mit dessen Hilfe man tatsächlich von einem dunklen Mittelalter sprechen kann – denn die angeblich in diesem Sinne Handelnden sind nicht etwa die Zeitgenossen eines real existierenden Mittelalters, sondern die Repräsentanten der Gegenwart. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Beobachtung könnte man sagen, daß Europa seit den vierziger Jahren versucht, wieder in das eigene Jahrhundert, das Zwanzigste, zurückzufinden.

Zurück zum tatsächlichen Mittelalter: Mathieu le Juif tritt zum Christentum über und erlebt sein neues Dasein als Katastrophe der Vereinsamung; Süskind von Trimberg verbleibt im Judentum und sieht sich gleichermaßen isoliert – durch die Vertreibung und die Heimatlosigkeit, die

ihm eine jüdenfeindliche Umgebung aufgezwungen hat. Auch jene Juden, die im maurischen Spanien leben und als Sepharden, als spanische Juden, die andere große jüdische Gesellschaft bilden, sind vor Anfeindungen und Verfolgung durch islamische Herrscher nicht sicher. Sie können sich jedoch vergleichsweise großer Freiheiten erfreuen: Denn als Nichtchristen sind sie keine unmittelbare Konkurrenz, sie stehen nicht für christliche Staaten und Könige mit Missionsansprüchen. Und sie vermitteln als Sprachkundige zwischen Antike und einer wissenshungrigen, jungen islamischen Gesellschaft. Sind Ashkenasen, die deutschen Juden, aus Gilden, Staatsämtern und Gesellschaften ausgeschlossen, finden sich Sepharden in vielen Berufen wieder, an Universitäten, ja sogar in Staatsdiensten. Sie werden so gleichsam die ersten jüdischen Aristokraten der Neuzeit. Doch Dichter und Denker gibt es auf sephardischer wie auf ashkenasischer Seite, und das selbst unter den teilweise erdrückenden Bedingungen für die Juden des christlichen Mitteleuropas; Dichter und Denker für mittelhochdeutsch, judendeutsch, französisch sprechende Menschen, so lange die Illusion reicht – das heißt: so lange, bis diese in den Flammen der Judenverfolgung zugrunde geht.

Sephardische und ashkenasische Juden sind stark von ihrer jeweiligen Umgebung geprägt und insofern jeder Minderheit vergleichbar. Sie übernehmen Formen der Dichtung, machen sich Sprachen und Melodien zu eigen, geben dem Jüdischsein an den verschiedensten Orten Europas unterschiedlichste Gestalt. Was bleibt, und was das Judentum in Mitteleuropa mit dem des Mittelmeeres und des Orients verbindet, ist die Torah, die fünf Bücher Moses, der Talmud, eine reichhaltige Responsaliteratur, und eine Sprache, die neben Ladino, Jüdischdeutsch und Judäo-Arabisch als Universalsprache dient: das Hebräische. Die Sprache der Torah.

## European Jewry

Whether or not the names Mathieu le Juif and Süskind von Trimberg actually stand for historically proven figures, their poetry mirrors the state of mind of specific parts of European Jewry in the Middle Ages.

The term "Middle Ages" covers a diverse period, which encompasses an equally diverse society. This society had to reorientate itself as "Europe" after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Polycentrism replaced central administration, causing severe problems. The Middle Ages darkened due, at least from our modern point of view, to the consequences of these crises, coupled with the image of the Middle Ages created by scholars in the nineteenth century. Temporal distance makes the whole appear simpler and more aestheticized than it actually was, and any picture of the Middle Ages brings with it an ominous element – anti-Semitism, as hatred of Jews is now being called. The ultimate consequences of this development are to be found in the unfortunate 1930s and 1940s. With the image of these years in mind, it is actually possible to talk about a contemporary, dark "Middle Ages" – those allegedly responsible are not inhabitants of the real Middle Ages, but representatives of the present. Seen from this perspective, one could say that since the 1940s Europe has been trying gradually to re-find the twentieth, that is to say its own, century.

To return to the real Middle Ages, Mathieu le Juif converted to Christianity and experienced his new isolationary existence as a catastrophe, whilst Süskind of Trimberg remained committed to Judaism and felt himself to be equally isolated as a result of the expulsion and homelessness imposed on him by a judeophobic environment.

The Jews of Moorish Spain, known as Sephardim, who formed the other great Jewish society, were also not

safe from discrimination and persecution by their Islamic rulers. However, they enjoyed comparative freedom: as non-Christians they did not present a direct challenge to the regime; they did not represent Christian States or kings with missionary ambitions. Moreover, well-versed in other languages, Sephardic Jews mediated between classical antiquity and a young, Islamic society thirsting for knowledge. Whilst Ashkenazim (i.e. German Jews) were excluded from guilds and societies and barred from taking public office, Sephardim held positions in universities and even in the civil service, thereby becoming the first Jewish "aristocrats" of modern times. But there were both Ashkenazic and Sephardic poets and thinkers, despite the sometimes oppressive conditions for Jews in Christian Central Europe. Poets and thinkers can be found amongst these speakers of Middle High German, Jewish German and French as long as the illusion remains, which is to say, until they were consumed by the fires of persecution. Both Sephardim and Ashkenazim were strongly influenced by their immediate environment and in this respect are comparable with any other minority. They used local poetic forms and adopted languages and melodies, thereby giving Jewishness a very different character in different parts of Europe. But a common underlying basis, and indeed that which links Central Europe Jewry with that of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, is provided by the Torah (the five Books of Moses), the Talmud (a very rich literature of responsa), and a language, which next to Ladino, Jewish German and Jewish Arabic serves as a universal language: Hebrew. The language of the Torah.

For the past two hundred years the study of Hebrew for the pupils of Cheder, for example, has begun in a highly sensual manner: the teacher drips honey on each letter, so that the language to be learnt becomes at the same

time a matter of physical importance and, most certainly, a matter of the heart. Furthermore, each individual letter and the language itself in general, is dealt with in every conceivable way. Each word and grammatical function is examined and defined from every possible angle. So, being accompanied by a benediction and therefore receiving linguistic explication, each act is fully explored and defined in detail – a blind man could follow the events.

The "sensitivity" of the letters explains their position in relation to music. Unlike the Christian mass, a synagogue service has never developed into a musical genre. This may largely be due to the enormous difficulties the Jews experienced in trying to integrate with society, but was possibly also a consequence of their own anxious isolation. Even though language is always a translation, a translation of an inner event, it appears to be more objective and unambiguous than music. (Yet, music plays a very important role in every society, not only when reciting a text in front of a large group of people. The singing voice carries the text further than the speaking voice would allow.) However, in the long term, this may also have been influenced by the views of the interpreters of Judaism, bearing in mind that discussions of the role of music in Jewish society permeate the Middle Ages. On the one hand, the rabbinical view was that music distracts from the essential, by giving pleasure whilst listening and in particular, by its capacity to arouse excessive human passions. On the other hand, the cabalists argued that music is an essential part of the text, able to provide meaning beyond words.

For the Hasidei Aschkenas, German mystics of the 13th century, a melody was a prerequisite to any expression of the love of God and the joy of the commandments. Music for them provided the basis of the Kavvanah (concentration), serving to deepen the concentration of the

cantor in particular. For that reason Yehuda He-Chassid, in the thirteenth century book *Sefer Hassidim*, says that one should select the melody for a text according to one's own preferences. Most of the songs on this record were created according to this principle.

The only authentic musical material belongs to the songs of Obadiahh. These pieces, notated in neumes, lay undiscovered until 1763, when they were found in the Cairo Geniza, an outstanding source of knowledge of the life of medieval European Jewry. As a Jewish convert, Obadja illustrates the fact that there were indeed Christians converting to Judaism, if only up until the time of the Crusades and great plagues. There are no indications of rhythm or dynamic in the source, so the text itself and its speech rhythms are used as guidelines for this recording. For the rest of the songs, the melodies reflect the preference of the ensemble and were, whenever possible, chosen for their contemporaneity with and topographical nearness to the texts. In addition, when using popular songs, the theme of the original text was also taken into account. For example, the song "Libi be'Misrahk" is a lamentation of the poet who suffers because he is far away from Jerusalem. The melody to this text is taken from the song "Ir me quiero a Yerushalayim". The poems are linked by the yearning for Jerusalem. The technique applied here is called *contrafactum* and is far from uncommon. Indeed, examples of *contrafactum* are found throughout the history of music and there are many reasons for its use. A popular melody is often utilised for new poetic creation, enabling a new song to be learnt more quickly – a technique that is of particular interest to the clergy when, for example, a text should gain speedy and wide acceptance.

The care taken with the interpretation and the efforts to create an awareness of human existence through lan-