

**JEWISH AT THE FRONT**

**The Experience of Jewish Officers in the German Army in World War I**

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**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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The Experience of Jewish Soldiers in the German Army in World War I

by

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The story that I seek to tell argues for Jewish integration in the army, acceptance of a particular Jewish identity but an amalgamation of that identity to being German. After the initial introductory chapter that explores historiographical and methodological questions, Chapter Two examines the experience of religion at the front. Jewish holidays offered an opportunity for Jewish soldiers to seek solace in their religion and camaraderie with their fellow Jews. The Christian holidays posed a challenge in how to celebrate with their Christian comrades. Jewish soldiers did celebrate Christmas, but with some detachment. Jewish soldiers were also to able “read” the Christian symbolism of sacrifice as it was used at the front, although with careful distance. In Chapter Three I discuss the encounter of German Jewish soldiers with Eastern European Jews on the eastern front. Jewish soldiers responded to the Eastern Jews either positively, negatively, or indifferently, but always with distance. The encounter often intensified their own Jewish identity, and yet the Eastern Jew remained as “Other,” even if an ethnic “grandparent.” In the final chapter I discuss experiences of antisemitism—excluding the

Judenzählung—and integration. Narrative anecdotal evidence is mixed with quantitative evidence culled from the cemeteries, published sources and archival material in order to clarify the extent of Jewish integration in the German army. I find that Jewish soldiers found integration and that antisemitism was not a significant factor in their war experience. Theirs was a war where they found themselves as Jews, men, soldiers and Germans, fighting for a future that might have been.

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All photographs and translations are my own except where otherwise noted. All errors are mine alone.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Story of a Minority**

Browsing in a used bookstore in Frankfurt am Main in the summer of 1999, I came upon a disheveled volume that immediately caught my interest. Published by the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, the organization of Jewish war veterans in Germany, in 1932, the *Gedenkbuch* (Memorial Book) for fallen Jewish soldiers in the German army in the First World War lists approximately 12,000 names of Jewish soldiers with their hometown, date of birth, date of death, rank and division.<sup>1</sup> Flipping through that long list of names, places and numbers, I was moved by the story it sought to tell, of how the Jewish community in Germany took up arms in defense of its Fatherland. Engaging matters of religion and secularization, antisemitism and integration, nationalism and identity, the experience of the Jewish soldiers in the German army in World War I illuminates the core issues of modern Jewish and German history. The Jewish soldiers who fought in the German army were not, as I will show, the victims of antisemitism, but rather discovered and confirmed their identity as Germans and Jews, successfully integrating as a part of the larger society. The discovery of that book on a high dusty shelf in a Frankfurt book store symbolized for me how a story has been left untold. This project is an attempt to begin to tell this story.

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<sup>1</sup> *Die jüdischen Gefallenen des deutschen Heeres, der deutschen Marine und der deutschen Schutztruppen 1914-1918: Ein Gedenkbuch*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, 1932).

## Situating German Jewish Soldiers in German History

The story that I seek to tell is not a prelude to 1933. The way the army treated its Jewish soldiers should not be read as standing in a line of continuity from some earlier moment of the development of Prussian militarism to the Nazi seizure of power. Rejecting the suppositions of the *Sonderweg* theory of Germany's special path to Hitler, the story of Jewish soldiers as told here has been influenced by such approaches to German history as exemplified in the work of Margaret Lavinia Anderson and Christopher Clark. Anderson, in *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*, shows how autocracy and illiberalism need not be the basic underlying principles of the story of the German Empire. Clark's *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* is a model of revisionist writing, showing how the very assumption that the Prussian heritage determined Germany's "special path" to Hitler is faulty at the root, not only because the Prussian heritage is complex and multi-faceted, but also because "Germany was not Prussia's fulfillment."<sup>2</sup> The story of Jewish soldiers requires a similar re-orientation away from the shadow of 1933.

Neither is the story I seek to tell a prelude to 1941. Casting an even greater cloud over German history, and specifically the history of the Jews in Germany, too many historical narratives cannot tell the story of the Jews in Germany without referencing it to its ultimate demise in the death camps of Auschwitz. Orienting German history either

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), p. xvi. Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). A classic summary presentation of the *Sonderweg* thesis is Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Oxford: Berg 1985). The classic refutation is David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). See the fascinating and balanced collection of essays (in Hebrew with an English introduction) from a conference on the *Sonderweg* held in Israel edited by Moshe Zimmermann, *Darkhah Hameyuhedet shel Germaniyah Behistoriah (Germany's Singular History)* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1989).

around 1933 or 1941, while an understandable hermeneutic, will ultimately distort the history we seek to uncover. Directed focus on Hitler and the Holocaust lacks what Helmut Walser Smith calls a necessary “depth of field.”<sup>3</sup>

Parallel to the historiographical *Sonderweg* debate is the division among historians of the Holocaust between the “intentionalists” who argue that the extermination of the Jews was planned by Hitler, and the “structuralists” who contend, in Ian Kershaw’s terms, that “the actual physical extermination of the Jews was not planned in advance, could at no time before 1941 be in any realistic sense envisaged or predicted, and emerged itself as an *ad hoc* ‘solution’ to the massive, and self-induced, administrative problems of the regime.”<sup>4</sup> While claiming to find a middle ground between the two schools of historical interpretation since he acknowledges the charismatic role played by Hitler, Kershaw argues cogently, in his essays and his magisterial biography of Hitler, that the demise of Germany’s Jewish population should not be seen as an inevitable end-result of German history leading up to 1941.

Key to the historiographical debate is the role of antisemitism in understanding both the Nazi rise to power and the Holocaust. In a discussion about the role of the *Sonderweg* and other theories of continuity in Germany history, Peter Pulzer introduces his revised classic volume on political antisemitism in Germany and Austria with the qualified statement: “A force as elemental as National Socialism, with anti-Semitism as an essential, though not its sole, ingredient must have deep roots in the political culture in which it flourished. That is not, of course, the same as saying that all of German history

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<sup>3</sup> See Helmut Walser Smith, “The Vanishing Point of German History: An Essay on Perspective,” *History and Memory* 17, nos. 1/2 (fall 2005): 269-295.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (Jerusalem and New Haven: Yad Vashem and Yale University Press, 2008), p. 239.

is the history of the origins of the Third Reich....There could have been no Third Reich without the pre-1918 Empire and no 'final solution' without the anti-Semitism of that epoch; but...the anti-Semitism of the Empire did not lead inexorably to the Holocaust. It was a necessary condition for it, but not a sufficient one."<sup>5</sup> Pulzer's careful explanation of the role of antisemitism in German history is appreciated in the context of most histories of modern antisemitism, which focused on the causal continuity from Second Reich prejudice to Third Reich genocide. The title of two of the classic studies of modern antisemitism, *Rehearsal for Destruction*, and *From Prejudice to Destruction*, exemplify this mainstream approach.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish soldiers did experience antisemitism in the German army in the First World War. But that experience was no more determinative or fatalist than the antisemitism that Jews experienced in the other forces of the war. Antisemitism was present, but it need not be read as "handwriting on the wall." The story that I seek to tell, situated against the Sonderweg school of interpretation, is that the continuities of German history do not necessarily lead directly to Auschwitz. There was nothing unique or peculiar about German antisemitism in World War I because antisemitism was not exclusive to Germany. Rather than tell their story as one leading to the Holocaust, I seek to tell the story of Jewish soldiers as one that could have led to something very different, perhaps even the Berlin Republic of today.

Anyone who approaches these meta-questions of German history does so with a sense of the moral role that the historian plays in society. With this larger context in

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, revised edition (London: Peter Halban, 1988), p. xv.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949); Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

mind, I must stress that there is no moral high-road held by those historians who claim that the Holocaust is *sui generis* and cannot be explained in normal historical terms. To compare the Holocaust to other genocides, to qualify the intentions of its actors, to appreciate that not everything German is evil, is not to commit a sacrilege against the victims of the Holocaust. Why, then, do we—or I—tell the story that way?

Peter Pulzer responds that the history of the Jews of Germany prior to 1933 should not be seen as “simply a prelude to the *shoah* or as a chronicle of false hopes or self-delusion, but as an experiment in co-existence that claimed initial successes before arriving at its ultimate failure. Despite the fact that this co-existence ended in catastrophe, it seemed to me—and not only to me—important to avoid reading German-Jewish history backwards.” What Pulzer writes about German-Jewish history applies to German history in general. Rather than write everything backwards as leading up to Hitler, the history should be understood on its own terms, with all the hopeful potentials that it promised to those who lived it. “The fact that the *shoah* happened,” Pulzer explains, “makes it all the more important not to write this history as if it consisted solely or primarily of prejudice, discrimination and organized anti-Semitism.”<sup>7</sup> History that is consciously not written backwards, as leading to Auschwitz, is no less focused on the Holocaust as a moral meaning for writing, as the other approach.

Michael André Bernstein’s *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*, although originating from a different discipline, provides a poetic argument for the approach articulated by Pulzer. Explaining why we tend to explain the past through what he calls “backshadowing”—what Pulzer calls “reading history backwards—Bernstein

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. xvii.

writes that “it is often by the shadows the sun casts, not by its direct light, that we can best calibrate where we stand.”<sup>8</sup> And so with historical trauma, he writes, “we try to make sense of a historical disaster by interpreting it, according to the strictest teleological model, as the climax of a bitter trajectory whose inevitable outcome it must be....The reward of fitting even catastrophic events into a coherent global schema is the pleasure of comprehension, the satisfaction of the human urge to make sense out of every occurrence, no matter how terrible.”<sup>9</sup> The attractiveness of a German Sonderweg to catastrophe, in other terms, is that it helps us understand how Hitler and Auschwitz came about. The alternative, that a leading liberal democracy and cultured society chose to elect the Nazis to power, is far more frightening.

Understanding the persistence of backwards-reading, however, can only help us in recognizing the distortion of that perspective and correcting for it. “If the story stops earlier,” Bernstein writes with pointed warning for projects like my own, “for example at the end of World War I, it need not allow, and indeed, may only be deflected by allowing the knowledge of the coming genocide to structure its account of the prior epoch.”<sup>10</sup> Bernstein is correct, and yet it is nigh impossible, especially for me as a Jewish historian, to erase 1941 from mind. The weight of this question rests on all historians of modern Germany. In their introduction to *German History from the Margins*, Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer and Mark Roseman reflect on how “the moral framework underlying almost all of the contributions [to the volume] does indeed derive ultimately from the challenge that Nazism and the Holocaust have bequeathed to contemporary scholars. In that sense, all

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<sup>8</sup> Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

avenues of enquiry lead directly or indirectly from Auschwitz.” However, “while National Socialism continues to set the ultimate reference point...the questions to which our post-Holocaust sensibility gives rise are beginning to take us down roads which do not, necessarily, lead us back to Auschwitz.”<sup>11</sup> Gregor, Roemer and Roseman shift the “special path” from German history to historiography. Rome is replaced with Auschwitz as the place where all roads lead from, but not necessarily where all roads must lead to. Historians of German history cannot but reflect on Hitler and the Holocaust. But they can also move beyond that and tell other stories.

For me, as a Jewish historian, telling a story that does not necessarily need to lead to Auschwitz (even though it does), carries its own moral framework, as hinted at by Gregor, Roemer and Roseman. History took the course it did, but it could have led elsewhere. Indeed, Nazism is a product of Germany history, but it is not the only product, and was not destined to supersede the others; neither has it done so now in the postwar, and certainly post-1989, era. The assertion that Nazism and the Holocaust were not the pre-destined end-products of modern German history is not only sound history but also morally charged. To assign the rise of Nazism and the evil of the Holocaust to something specific to German history or culture is to fail to explain how human beings could bring about such a tragedy. To explain the Holocaust as *sui generis* is to fail to contextualize it, which is the moral duty of historians. The moral task of historians is to explain not only what people did do, but what people—any people—can do.

Because I cannot escape the specters of 1933 and 1941, the final chapter of this study is devoted to the question of the nature of the antisemitism that Jewish soldiers

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer and Mark Roseman, eds., *German History from the Margins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 20.

directly experienced at the front. A project free of those “shadows” might not even address the question. And yet, my conclusion is that the role of antisemitism was inconsequential to their experience. My approach parallels—in part—the significant work by Till van Rahden on the Jews of Breslau. Van Rahden begins and ends his study with a denial of a “direct or twisted line of continuity that leads from imperial Germany to National Socialism and the Holocaust.”<sup>12</sup> Van Rahden shows, through his analysis of Jewish integration in cultural associations, intermarriage patterns, access to mixed schooling and involvement in urban politics, that the Jews were a well integrated and influential minority. Not discounting the presence of antisemitism, especially in the 1880s and 90s, van Rahden, using the terminology of Shulamit Volkov, understands the phenomenon as a “cultural code” of elitist opposition to the success of the new middle class, where the Jews were well represented.<sup>13</sup> Van Rahden’s contextualization of antisemitism allows him to acknowledge its presence and then to “move on.” Like van Rahden, I explain where I am coming from and where I am not going.

### **Situating German Jewish Soldiers in Gender History: On Men at War**

The story I seek to tell is about the experience of Jewish men at the front. An important methodological question is how their experience was gendered. Military histories tend to focus on men as the primary military actors. Important work by Ute Daniel, Belinda Davis and Benjamin Ziemann has expanded the parameters of the “war

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<sup>12</sup> Till van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity, and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860-1925*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), p. 242, and see p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-83; Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 23 (1978): 25-46.

experience” to include the home front and, thereby, women’s experiences.<sup>14</sup> While my approach is also social rather than military, I have focused my attention on Jewish soldiers, all of whom are male.

Karen Hagemann laments that “the maleness of the military and war continues to be so self-evident to most military historians as to require no critical scrutiny....Most works of military history have focused on male actors, to be sure, but without addressing their gender, their culturally and socially constructed masculinity, or their relationships, as men to other men as well as to women.”<sup>15</sup> A gendered reading of the war experience of Jewish men at the front must characterize the masculinity of their experience as a culturally constructed identity-in-formation within a context of other foci of identity.

George L. Mosse’s remarks should be clarified when he writes that “the Great War was a masculine event, in spite of the role it may have played in encouraging the greater independence of women. The men at the front saw women largely in a passive role as nurses or prostitutes.”<sup>16</sup> The circularity of his argument is betrayed by his focus on how “men...saw women.” From the perspective of women, for whom the war was no less world-changing and whose roles were no less active, the war experience would not be perceived as so exclusively masculine. However, if we restrict Mosse’s remark to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ute Daniel, *The War Within: German Working Class Women in the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914-1918*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2007). Ziemann’s dual emphasis on the experience of soldiers at the front and at home is made explicit in the original German title: *Front und Heimat: Ländliche Kriegserfahrungen in südlichen Bayern 1914-1923* (Essen: Klartext, 1997). The English translation not only loses the force of the main German title by choosing to use only the subtitle, but even the translation of the subtitle loses the sense of a competing local identity as formative, as well as its specificity to southern Bavaria.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Hagemann, “Military, War, and the Mainstreams: Gendering Modern German Military History,” in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quartaert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History: Themes, Debates, Revisions* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 63, 64.

<sup>16</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 107-108.

experience of men in the war and at the front, then he provides a useful interpretation. Male soldiers' encounters with women at the front as nurses or as prostitutes intensified their distance from women as Other, thereby intensifying their own masculine experience. In the following chapter I consider the soldier's image of the nurse as both one of religious salvation and pornographic fantasy. The third chapter discusses the encounter with Jewish prostitutes on the eastern front. I propose that it is the Otherness of the women encountered at the front rather than their passivity—for neither nurses nor prostitutes act a “passive role”—that intensifies the masculine experience of the front that Mosse articulates.

The war experience was formative, in Mosse's narrative, of the idea of modern masculinity. “The sense of having achieved the freedom ‘to be a man’ through the instrumentality of war” he writes, “was widely shared.”<sup>17</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, in her study of American Jewish soldiers in the Second World War, articulates the formative experience that war service had for the Jewish men of that generation, both as Jews and as men.<sup>18</sup> Her argument, that “Jewish veterans could feel that in doing their part for America they had knocked down (if not out) stereotypes about Jewish men as conniving, unpatriotic cowards,” reads in sharp contrast to the work of Daniel Boyarin who labors to defend an alternative (and in his opinion authentically Jewish) model of the Jewish man as gentle, scholarly and unwarlike.<sup>19</sup>

I am not setting out to articulate a specific image of modern Jewish masculinity. The variety of models that have been proposed exemplifies that the complexities of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, p. xi; Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

gender identity are no less compelling than those of national and religious identity, and that individual identity is made up of an amalgamation of these variant and competing claims. Recognizing the confluence of different identities allows us to expand the categories of analysis previously employed. “Combining gender studies and Jewish studies,” writes Benjamin Maria Baader, “has led to an examination of masculinity in relation to questions of German nationhood and German identity.”<sup>20</sup> Reading masculinity into the experience of German Jewish soldiers is more than a men’s history; it is a reflection on the particularity of experience. In this sense, I find Robin Judd’s reflection compelling, that “scholars who work in gender history imagine themselves as writing narratives of German Jewish history; ideally, scholars of German Jewish history ought to similarly envision their task as writing gender history. Moreover, gender as a category of analysis can allow for scholars to move beyond the traditional binaries of ‘German’ and ‘Jewish’ when examining the identity construction and community building of German-speaking Jews.”<sup>21</sup> The introduction of a “third-party”—masculinity—into the equation of being German and being Jewish adds a needed corrective to the narrative I wish to explore, opening the possibility that *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* are not the diametrically opposed poles that they are often imagined to be. Just as the recognition of the gendered experience of women’s and men’s history brings the two together in reading a more compelling synthesized “text,” so does the gendering of the experience of Jewish soldiers, as men and as Jews, help us understand them *as* Germans.

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Maria Baader, “Jews, Women and Germans: Jewish and German Historiographies in a Transatlantic Perspective,” in Hagemann and Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> Robin Judd, “What’s Next in Modern German Jewish History?” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 48-49.

## **Situating German Jewish Soldiers in Minority History: On Hybridity and *Heimat***

The gendering of German Jewish history allows one to reject the older binary model of a German-Jewish “symbiosis” in favor of more complex and heterogeneous constructs. The paradigm of gender history leads one to greater inclusiveness of all categories, such as “the inclusion of Jews in the German historical narrative, and not just as victims of antisemitism.”<sup>22</sup> Just as Judaism needs to be integrated into the “mainstream” narrative of German history, so does the Germanness of German Jews need to be incorporated into Jewish history, not as a polar opposite but as an integrated part of their identity. As Paula E. Hyman writes about European culture in general, but easily applied specifically to the German Jewish model: “That the Jewish and European components of their identities were fused for many European Jews provides a nuanced understanding of their hybrid Jewish identities.”<sup>23</sup> The hybridity model, originating in the postcolonial theory of Homi K. Bhaba, goes beyond the symbiosis model in proposing that the minority culture is transformed through its interaction with the majority—or colonial—culture, which in turn affects the majority culture, so that the two become not only inseparable—as in the symbiosis model—but also unique at the same time.<sup>24</sup> “Minority cultures,” writes Jeremy Cohen on the hybridity model, “emerge afresh in the spaces where they encounter the dominant cultures in which they reside. This encounter is a highly fluid one, riddled with ambivalence, the blurring of boundaries,

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<sup>22</sup> Paula E. Hyman [writing here about Till van Rahden], “Does Gender Matter? Locating Women in European Jewish History,” in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009), p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> See Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). For some reflections on the implications of the hybridity model on Jewish historiography, see Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), esp. pp. 94-104.

cooperation as well as resistance, and a creative responsiveness to the ‘other’ that has implications for both colonizer and colonized alike.”<sup>25</sup>

The purposed ambiguity of the hybridity model reveals not only the complexities around questions of national self-definition, but also the interrelation of competing and alternative sources of identity. Benjamin Ziemann, Alon Confino and Celia Applegate have each articulated how German national identity cannot be properly understood without understanding the competing and alternative local identities inherent in the concept of *Heimat*.<sup>26</sup> As Geoff Eley explains, “Such works are rethinking the meaning of ‘the local’ in their relationship to the emerging imaginary of the new national state, elucidating the dynamic reciprocities between local and regional rootedness on the one side and national identification on the other.”<sup>27</sup> Local *Heimat* identity introduces yet another party into the competing claims of self-definition and understanding that would come into play in the war experience of German soldiers. To this we might also add class consciousness, an important element of distinction in the work of Benjamin Ziemann, as well as Jeffrey Verhey’s corrective work on the initial war enthusiasm, and van Rahden’s study of the social structure of Breslau Jewry.<sup>28</sup>

Applying the studies on *Heimat* to German Jewish history, Nils Roemer suggests that *Heimat* plays a direct role in the articulation of German Jewish identity. “The local

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<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Cohen, introduction to Cohen and Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Geoff Eley, “How and Where is German History Centered?” in Gregor, Roemer and Roseman, eds., *German History from the Margins*, p. 279.

<sup>28</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*; Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*. Verhey argues that the initial war enthusiasm was specific to the urban bourgeoisie. Van Rahden demonstrates how the standard historiographic assumptions that the Jews were all members of the bourgeoisie are inaccurate, as there were many poor Jews as well as Jews of the lower middle class. Nevertheless, the Jews played an important role in the bourgeoisie, and shared in the initial war enthusiasm.

historical grounding of Jewish memory,” he writes, “continued to outpace attempts to forge a comprehensive German-Jewish heritage.”<sup>29</sup> While I do not address this question in this work, further study of the war experience of German Jewish soldiers would contribute to the understanding of the role of Heimat as a mitigating factor of national identity. Local identities were very important, especially in the distinction between Bavarians and other Germans, since the Bavarian army, while under the same supreme command, was administered from Munich as a royal army rather than from Berlin. “The Bavarians are very nice, brave fellows” remarks the Jewish soldier Julius Marx in his diary upon meeting with a Bavarian battalion on the western front in 1914.<sup>30</sup> Particularly striking in my own research with officer personnel records at the Bavarian Military Archives in Munich was a total inconsistency with the way that the Prussian Iron Cross was recorded. The records had two columns for the listing of decorations: *vaterländische* (national) and *fremde* (foreign). The Royal Bavarian Military Order was always listed under “national,” whereas Austrian decorations were always listed under “foreign.” But the Prussian Iron Cross, which was of course the principal decoration of the German army, was sometimes listed under “national” with the Bavarian decorations, but just as often under “foreign” with the Austrian decorations! Even army bureaucrats contended with the interplay of local and national—or in this case, national and imperial—identity.

Beyond the specific application of Heimat to Jewish identity is the analogy that it affords to a minority culture within a larger whole. Jewish identity could be understood as a type of “local” identity amid the larger nation. Michael Wolffsohn and Thomas

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<sup>29</sup> Nils Roemer, “Between the Provinces and the City: Mapping German-Jewish Memories,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 51 (2006): 75.

<sup>30</sup> Julius Marx, *Kriegstagebuch eines Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Ner Tamid Verlag, 1964), p. 35, entry for 15 October 1914.

Brechenmacher recently published a reflective essay on Jewish integration in Germany both before and after the Nazi era, *Deutschland, Jüdisch Heimatland*.<sup>31</sup> Till van Rahden has articulated this proposal in a study of how German Jews used the term *Stamm* to understand their place in Germany.<sup>32</sup> While he translates *Stamm* as “tribe,” in the sense of the Jews being one of “the German tribes,” I think it more useful to think of the idea as ethnicity. Combining the concepts of ethnicity and locality, van Rahden, in *Juden und andere Breslauer*, proposes that German Jewish identity be understood as “situational ethnicity.”<sup>33</sup> Anticipating what is often called “secular Judaism” in the contemporary American context, van Rahden explains in his essay, “Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*,” that with the growth of secularization, religion failed to serve as an adequate explanation of difference for German Jews. “Once many German Jews considered themselves to be part of a ‘tribe’ rather than a religious community,” he writes, “the tension between equality before the law in an age of national unity and a right to be different had to be reconceptualized and renegotiated. After the 1870s, the emancipation-era arguments about religious diversity and the neutrality of the state had to be recast in more universal terms to include a right to be culturally and ethnically different, too.”<sup>34</sup> Matching the discourse on hybridity as well as a vision of contemporary multi-culturalism, van Rahden concludes his essay with the challenging observation that “Protestants did not enjoy a monopoly on defining what it meant to be German, nor were they more nationalistic than other Germans.” If there is a whole—the nation—that is made up of constituent parts—

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Wolffsohn and Thomas Brechenmacher, *Deutschland, Jüdisch Heimatland: Die Geschichte die deutschen Juden vom Kaiserreich bis heute* (Munich: Piper, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Till van Rahden, “Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*: Visions of Community between Nationalism and Particularism, 1850-1933,” in Gregor, Roemer and Roseman, eds., *German History from the Margins*, pp. 27-48. See also van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> van Rahden, “Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*,” p. 36.

whether they be ethnic tribes or religious confessions—then each component has the right to identify how it understands the whole, both minority components and majority components. Citing both Catholic and Jewish examples of German nationalism, van Rahden observes that “in the context of German history, such negotiations and contestations among competing conceptions of the German nation continued until the suspension of the rule of law in January 1933—and resumed after the destruction of the ‘Third Reich’ in May 1945. Nationalist dreams of a nation, one and indivisible, should not distract us from the fact that there were competing, possibly antagonistic visions of that very national unity.”<sup>35</sup> Van Rahden’s remarks are a perfect example of how a German historian can come from 1933 but not go to 1933. His project is to make the case that the Nazi image of Germany, and that put forward by the interpreters of the German Sonderweg, is but one of many conceptions of Germany. In his study *Juden und andere Breslauer*, van Rahden demonstrates how the Jews made up an integral component of an urban society.

Van Rahden’s contribution to the issue of what Jewish identity means as a part and component of German identity raises the core question of the nature of a majority culture. “This,” writes Miriam Rürup, “is a major problem of minority history: In talking about a minority, we always assume an existing majority. We should, however—and this applies to the whole of the science of history—question the existence of a majority in general.”<sup>36</sup> This is the final nail in the coffin of the old model of the German-Jewish dichotomy and symbiosis. Jewish identity did not conflict with *Germanness*; it made a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>36</sup> Miriam Rürup, “Comments on Current and Future Directions in German-Jewish Studies,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 25.

Jew German. This deconstruction of the majority culture calls, in turn, for attention to the nature of the minority culture.<sup>37</sup>

### **Situating German Jewish Soldiers in Jewish History: On Assimilation, Acculturation and Integration**

Before a discussion of the implications of the story of German Jewish soldiers on the long-standing Jewish historiographical problem of assimilation and its alternative phraseologies, it is necessary to first review the place of Jewish participation in the First World War within Jewish historiography. A brief survey will show that the Jewish war experience has indeed been neglected. None of the current survey textbooks of Jewish history devote anything but cursory attention to the First World War. The 1170-page history edited by H.H. Ben-Sasson, while mentioning the plight of Russian Jews during the war, focuses on the periods before and after the war, but not on the war itself. A more recent survey by Lloyd Gartner of modern Jewish history only briefly addresses the Jewish experience of the First World War, giving some of the statistics of Jewish participation, and noting that “the vast majority of Jews pledged support to their respective countries, although it was a disturbing thought that Jew might fight Jew in opposite armies.” Gartner’s focus is more the results of the war on Jewish history. Howard Sachar’s new 2005 survey of modern Jewish history does devote more space to World War I than his 1958 survey. Unlike his three pages in the early 617-page volume that focused on the hardships that wartime brought for the Jewish populations of Poland and Russia, almost two pages in the new 831-page work address the specific experience

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<sup>37</sup> On the complexities of defining the majority culture in this context, see James Sheehan, “What is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography,” *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981).

of German Jewry in the War. David Vital's masterful history of modern European Jewish political history from the French Revolution to the outbreak of World War II, *A People Apart*, devotes significant attention to World War I. But his fifty-page chapter (out of a 944-page volume) is mostly devoted to the activities of the Zionist movement regarding the status of the Jewish settlement in Palestine.<sup>38</sup>

From the perspective of traditional German Jewish historiography, World War I serves as yet another episode in the tragic exercise in futility of the Jewish quest to find acceptance in Germany, characteristic of Jewish historiography that is written in the shadow of the Holocaust, and best symbolized, as already noted, in the title of Amos Elon's popular narrative, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany*. The specialized historiography of German Jewry cannot quite ignore World War I. The assumption of German Jewish historiography that the German Jews rose to fulfill their duty in defense of Germany is generally accepted despite allegations by the antisemites through the Nazi period that the Jews had been disloyal. The question of Jewish participation in the war effort is highlighted by the *Judenzählung*, the 1916 military census of Jews that German Jews found humiliating since it questioned their loyalty and singled them out as Jews. This incident has received significant attention from Werner Angress (among a number of essays on Jews in the German army) and Jacob Rosenthal, as will be discussed further in this chapter. Historical treatments of German Jewry and World War I have been informed more by assumption than careful review of the

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<sup>38</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 888-889; Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews in Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 9, quotation from p. 267; Howard M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (Cleveland: World, 1958), pp. 296-298; Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), ch. 17; David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe 1789-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 7.

evidence. No major study in English has been devoted to the German Jewish experience of World War I, attempting to document the nature and meaning of the German Jewish *Kriegserlebnis* (war experience). A number of studies by historians of German Jewry do address the war period, if not directly the war experience. Peter Pulzer wrote the relevant chapter in the four-volume history of German Jewry edited by Michael Meyer. The *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, the journal of German Jewish studies, has printed a number of articles on the World War I period. Werner E. Mosse edited an important collection of essays in 1971, and two recent studies have addressed the situation of the Habsburg Jews during the War. Ulrich Sieg has published a study of Jewish intellectual life during the First World War. The recent survey of German Jewish social history edited by Marion Kaplan devotes but a few pages to the World War I years. Gregory Caplan wrote a dissertation on German Jewish soldiers in the War, but while his study devotes a chapter to the war experience itself, his primary focus is the legacy of the War during the Weimar Republic and the organizational history of the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, the Weimar organization of Jewish war veterans. Despite this requisite if unfocused attention on World War I in German Jewish historiography, it cannot be denied that in that historiography, and all the more so in general Jewish historiography, World War I is a passing event of “the surrounding world.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), ch. 9. (Elon elaborates on and is inspired by Fritz Stern, *Einstein's German World* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999]); Peter Pulzer, “The First World War” in Michael Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vol. 3, *Integration in Dispute 1871-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), ch. 12; Werner E. Mosse, ed., *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution 1916-1923* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1971); Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (London: Littman, 2001); Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg: Kriegserfahrungen, weltanschauliche Debatten und kulturelle Neuentwürfe* (Berlin: Akademie, 2001); Marion A. Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (Oxford: Oxford

One reason that World War I is seemingly neglected in Jewish historiography is because it is so overshadowed by the horror of the Holocaust.<sup>40</sup> As discussed above, historians of Germany tend to focus on 1933 (the Nazi seizure of power) and 1941 (the advent of the “Final Solution” phase of the Holocaust) as the frames of reference for German history. Jewish historians see the great turning point as not only the Holocaust but also the almost contemporaneous establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The significance of 1914 and the First World War pales in comparison.

A related and specific factor in the neglect of World War I in Jewish historiography is the release of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (the statement of British policy in favor of the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine) and the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine after the War, which tend to attract the focus of Jewish historians away from the war itself. The history of Zionism is given primary importance in Jewish historiography because it leads to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. But again, the historian must be aware of the distortions of hindsight-reading. During the years 1914 to 1918, European Jewry was focused on the War. The mainstream Jewish organizations in both the Central Powers and the Western allies devoted themselves to statements of patriotism, aiding the war effort, and assisting in charitable endeavors. Zionism had not yet captured the hearts of most Jews. While the Zionist movement sought to garner from the peace settlement an opportunity to establish

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University Press, 2005), pp. 267-269; Gregory A. Caplan, “Wicked Sons, German Heroes: Jewish Soldiers, Veterans and Memories of World War I in Germany” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> The once-classic one-volume Jewish history by Margolis and A. Marx has a short chapter devoted to World War I, but that was published before the outbreak of World War II, when the Great War was still great. See Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1927), ch. 97.

a Jewish homeland in Palestine, European Jewry was focused on conditions closer to home.

Yet another significant factor is the ambivalence that the Jewish experience of World War I raises among Jewish historians. The War found Jews fighting Jews on all sides, a phenomenon which did have some precedent (like the American Civil War) but was generally rare for Jewish history. Jewish historians recognize that people who held extra-national identities (economic class, religious confession, race, etc.) fought wars against each other as well, but none of these extra-national identities are seen by Jewish historians to be as determinative as Jewish identity. Zionist influenced post-Holocaust Jewish historiography emphasizes Jewish nationalism, and so, the fact that Jews would choose duty to Germany (or any of the other Great Powers, but especially Germany), when it meant combating other Jews, could be, from the perspective of the later twentieth century, somewhat awkward. World War I offered an opportunity for European Jews, after a century of emancipation, to demonstrate their national identity, devotion, and patriotism. That demonstration of intensified assimilated identity was not of great interest to post-Holocaust, Zionist-trained Jewish historians who understood modern Europe as having turned its back on the Jews. There have been notable Jewish historians who have begun to write Jewish history with a more positive view of the Diaspora experience. This study seeks to expand that “corrective” to the World War I experience.<sup>41</sup>

For those unfamiliar with German Jewish history, it may seem counterintuitive that Jews fought for Germany. Bryan Mark Rigg explores this emotion in his study of *Mischlinge* (partial Jews) in the German army in the Second World War, documenting

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. the work of Salo Baron and his students, especially the already cited survey by Lloyd Gartner.

the extent to which these Mischlinge served and participated in the Third Reich's war effort.<sup>42</sup> However, that Jews fought for Germany in the First World War should not be considered extraordinary. German Jews had been identifying *as Germans* for about a hundred years. In 1871, with the establishment of the German Empire, Jewish emancipation was confirmed for all the German lands.<sup>43</sup> Jews looked to the Reich as the guarantor of their liberty as well as the symbol of the culture and society through which they saw and understood themselves. By defending the German Empire they were defending themselves. And yet, this is not a story that fits easily within the meta-narrative of post-Holocaust Jewish historiography.

Discomfort with the idea of Jews defending Germany leads us to the final factor in the relative neglect of World War I in Jewish historiography, the idea that the direct participation of Jews in World War I was on behalf of their assimilated national identities rather than their Jewish identities, so that the story is less "Jewish history" in any specific way. The question of assimilation—like minority and hybridity—is a concept that is being re-evaluated along with the interrelationship of Jewish and German identity.

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<sup>42</sup> Bryan Mark Rigg, *Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002) and *Lives of Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: Untold Tales of Men of Jewish Descent Who Fought for the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009). For my review of the first book: "Review of Bryan Mark Rigg, *Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military*," *H-German*, *H-Net Reviews*, July, 2004. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=138621093869821>.

<sup>43</sup> The Leo Baeck Institute's four-volume survey, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, edited by Michael A. Meyer, is the authoritative treatment. For the period of emancipation, see vol. 2: *Emancipation and Acculturation: 1780-1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). See also Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*.

“The concept of assimilation,” David Sorkin wrote in 1992, “albeit central to the study of European Jewish history, has not received much scholarly attention.”<sup>44</sup> Assimilation was a discomfiting topic for Jewish historians since it was seen as a kind of ethnic heresy. Many Jewish historians have preferred the term “acculturation” as a less objectionable process whereby the minority takes on aspects of the majority culture without the negative valence of “assimilation” where the minority culture is in danger of losing its rootedness.<sup>45</sup> Gerson D. Cohen raised eyebrows in 1966 when he spoke of “The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History.” His argument was that “a frank appraisal of the periods in which Judaism flourished will indicate that not only did a certain amount of assimilation and acculturation not impede Jewish continuity and creativity, but that in a profound sense, this assimilation and acculturation was a stimulus to original thinking and expression, a source of renewed vitality.”<sup>46</sup> Arguing for the positive value of interchange with the surrounding culture, Cohen uses the terms “assimilation” and “acculturation” interchangeably. Once listening to a lecture by a prominent German-Jewish émigré and historian, I learned that when Germans say “*Assimilation*” in German they mean “acculturation” in English. In order to avoid any ambiguity, I prefer the term “integration” when appropriate.

More recent scholarship has been far less timid in approaching “assimilation” as both a word and a concept in Jewish history. Scholars in two collections of historiographic reflection both published in 2009 articulate the recent shift. Maud

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<sup>44</sup> David Sorkin, “The Impact of Emancipation on German Jewry: A Reconsideration,” in Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 194, n. 1.

<sup>45</sup> On the terms “assimilation” and “acculturation” in Jewish historiography, see Jonathan Frankel, “Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?” in Frankel and Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community*, pp. 21ff.

<sup>46</sup> Gerson D. Cohen, “The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Destiny* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 151.

Mandel announces: “Assimilation is no longer a dirty word in the field of modern Jewish history.”<sup>47</sup> She explains the prior ambivalence as due to “the tremendous devastation of European Jewish life wrought by the Holocaust....Historiographical literature covering the twentieth century stresses the exclusions and persecutions Jews faced more than their inclusion and subsequent transformation.”<sup>48</sup> Andreas Gotzman bemoans the focus on the negative: “The research that has been fostered has remained closely associated with the idea of assimilation, implying that German-Jewish culture has been defined by a significant loss of what it means to be Jewish. Whilst most contemporary scholars agree that regardless of the known difficulties and, even, deficiencies, the economic and social history of Jews in Germany appears to be a success story, especially when compared to other social minorities such as women or ethnic groups such as the Roma, there may have been a softening of the general critique that this was at the price of a necessary or even a voluntary loss of uniqueness. Yet it still prevails in all books and articles dealing with social and religious changes in modern time. This seems very strange because what is disqualified as assimilation from the standpoint of cultural history constitutes nothing less than the positive core of this tradition.”<sup>49</sup> Echoing Gerson Cohen four decades earlier, Gotzman argues for the celebration of successful assimilation.

A. Dirk Moses identifies the problem with the old model of German-Jewish symbiosis, which, while acknowledging the interrelationship, sees “Germans” and “Jews” as distinct categories. David Sorkin had, in 1987, proposed that German Jewry be understood as a “subculture” within German culture. While Till van Rahden has proposed

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<sup>47</sup> Maud Mandel, “Assimilation and Cultural Exchange in Modern Jewish History,” in Cohen and Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History*, p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> Andreas Gotzman, “German-Jewish Studies: A Review,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 18.

his model of “situational ethnicity” that encompasses a fuller integration in the second half of the nineteenth century as opposed to the partially integrated “subculture” which fits better with the first half of the century, he builds his interpretive construct upon Sorkin’s work.<sup>50</sup> According to Moses, however, Sorkin’s proposal was never fully realized because of the inability of scholars and their readers to avoid the differentiation between Germans and Jews. “This subconscious division of the world into Jews and non-Jews,” he writes, “—with nothing in between—subtends understandings of Jewish emancipation in Germany as amounting to ‘utter Jewish assimilation’ and the decline of autonomous Jewish strength and vitality. This is a remarkable view in light of David Sorkin’s well-known argument that German-Jews developed their own sub-culture that transcended such stark dichotomies.”<sup>51</sup>

No one has taken these questions on more directly than Deborah Hertz in her provocative book about Jewish conversion to Christianity in Berlin through the early nineteenth century, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*.<sup>52</sup> “Evaluating assimilation,” she writes, “is at the heart of our troubles about the German-Jewish past.”<sup>53</sup> Hertz explains how while the German Jews prided themselves on their successful assimilation, after the Holocaust “many Jews in Europe and beyond concluded that the tragic events of the Nazi era showed that assimilation had never actually been achieved at all, even when it seemed to be going so

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<sup>50</sup> van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> A. Dirk Moses, “The Contradictory Legacies of German Jewry,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 37; David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

well.”<sup>54</sup> Hertz asks that we judge the subjects of her research on their own terms. I ask the same for German Jewish soldiers.

The story that I seek to tell is about German Jewish soldiers who saw themselves as integrated and in the process of being integrated, both in terms of rank and social acceptance, in the German army with their non-Jewish comrades. Their story should not be read as one of misguided blindness. Their place in their culture and society is something that must be established, which I try to do, because of the long shadow of the Nazis and the Holocaust. As Moshe Zimmermann explains, “Since the special profile of German-Jewish history—compared, for instance, to Tunisian-Jewish or Italian-Jewish history—is closely connected to the crisis of 1933, no matter whether we use the term ‘emancipation,’ ‘assimilation,’ ‘integration,’ ‘inclusion,’ or ‘symbiosis,’ this period and this crisis will continue to be the revolving door through which new historians and innovative approaches enter.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Situating German Jewish Soldiers in Comparative History**

A comparative study of the war experiences of Jewish soldiers in other belligerent forces in World War I is beyond the scope of this project. One contribution that a comparative study would bring would be a contextualization of the integration of Jews in the German army in comparison to other armies. Such a comparison would help understand if the German Jews were facing a particularly antisemitic context, or, more likely, that the prejudices that they experienced were not unique.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, “Revision?—Not Again: New Directions in German-Jewish History?” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 55.

It is generally well-known that the Russian Imperial army was not a good place for Jews. Mark Levene discusses the Russian army's mistreatment of its Jewish soldiers, accusing them of spying on behalf of Germany.<sup>56</sup> Joseph W. Bendersky, in the initial chapters of his history of antisemitism in the U.S. Army, discusses the antisemitic attitudes toward and treatment of Jewish soldiers in World War I.<sup>57</sup> Richard Slotkin has written a fascinating book on the experience of both African American and Jewish soldiers in the U.S. Army in World War I. He complements Bendersky's account of antisemitism in the U.S. Army. More revealing is how segregation institutionalized racism in the culture of the American military in contradistinction to other belligerent forces like France. Slotkin's work is particularly useful because of the story he tells of how both Jews and African Americans saw their war experience as an opportunity to win recognition and better integration at home, as well as the role of the war experience in expanding the definition of what it means to be American.<sup>58</sup> The American Jewish community published polemically charged statistics and narrative accounts of the war record and patriotism of American Jews in the war, not unlike the publications of the German Jewish community.<sup>59</sup> War service was seen in both countries as a demonstration of integration and belonging, as well as an opportunity to establish the "masculinity" or

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<sup>56</sup> Mark Levene, "Frontiers of Genocide: Jews in the Eastern War Zones, 1914-1920 and 1941," in Pankos Panayi, ed., *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 93ff. On Jewish soldiers in the Russian army in World War I, see also David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 136.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph W. Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> See *The War Record of American Jews* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1919); Samuel Walker McCall, *Patriotism of the American Jew* (New York: Plymouth Press, 1924), ch. 10; Sidney G. Gumpertz, *The Jewish Legion of Valor: The Story of Jewish Heroes in the Wars of the Republic and a General History of the Military Exploits of the Jews Throughout the Ages* (New York: Sidney G. Gumpertz, 1941).

“virility” of Jewish men. In this context, Jewish valor takes on a minority as well as a gendered meaning.

Marsha L. Rozenblit argues for a qualified positive experience of Jews in the Austrian army. “Serving in the army strengthened the Austrian identity of Austrian Jews,” she writes, “but it did not necessarily integrate them into Austrian society.”<sup>60</sup> Rozenblit reports that “in 1897, almost 19% of all Habsburg reserve officers were Jews, and that percentage applied during the war as well.”<sup>61</sup> Jews achieved proportionately high rank in the Austrian army and their successful integration can be explained as peculiar to the Austrian-Hungarian multi-ethnic population where the Austrian Jews, educated and German-speaking, were of value to the military authorities. Rozenblit’s qualification that army integration did not translate to social integration is marked by her acknowledgement that “comradeship did not play a major role in the war experience of Jewish soldiers.”<sup>62</sup> She contends that “most Jewish soldiers insisted that they did not encounter any anti-Semitism in the service” and contrasts this to the experience of Jews in the German army, “which allowed no Jews at all to serve as reserve officers”—although it did during the war, and before the war the Bavarian army did, where any German Jew could serve—and where “growing anti-Semitism during the war led to the increased estrangement of Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers in the trenches....Austrian Jewish soldiers—indeed Austrian Jews in general—could feel genuine relief that their army appreciated them and would not acquiesce to anti-Semitism.”<sup>63</sup> Rozenblit’s qualified assessment of the experience of Austrian Jewish soldiers points to the

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<sup>60</sup> Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 93, 94.

uniqueness of the Austrian context. Her general negative assessment of the experience of German Jewish soldiers is not the story that I have researched. Such a disparity will be resolved by a proper comparative study, which remains a desideratum.<sup>64</sup>

### **Situating German Jewish Soldiers in World War I History**

As we approach one hundred years since the events of the First World War, the scholarship continues to grow. Recent historiographic reviews account for a mass of studies in multiple disciplines.<sup>65</sup> I situate my approach as following a path set by Annette Becker and Raymond Jonas in analyzing the role of religion at the front, and by Benjamin Ziemann in looking at the war experiences of ordinary people and how they construct their identities.<sup>66</sup> These fall within the general category of studies of the social nature of the war experience (*Kriegserlebnis*) and every-day life (*Alltagsgeschichte*).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> For a brief overview of the Jewish experience in the French, Austrian, Rumanian and Italian armies, not restricted to World War I, see Michael Berger, *Eisernes Kreuz und Davidstern: Die Geschichte Jüdischer Soldaten in Deutschen Armeen* (Berlin: trafo, 2006), pp. 236-250.

<sup>65</sup> See Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Der Erste Weltkrieg in der deutschen und internationalen Geschichtsschreibung," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 29/30 (2004): 3-12; Belinda Davis, "Experience, Identity, and Memory: The Legacy of World War I" *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (March 2003): 111-131; Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and the articles in Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, eds., *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004). Winter and Prost focus on literature in English and French. The German studies compensate with ample review of German language publications. Russian historiography would combine First World War studies with the Russian Revolution.

<sup>66</sup> Annette Becker, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930*, trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford: Berg, 1998); Raymond Jonas, *The Tragic Tale of Claire Ferchaud and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ziemann, *War Experiences*.

<sup>67</sup> See Anne Lipp, *Meinunglenkung im Krieg: Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, Dieter Langewiesche and Hans-Peter Ullman, eds., *Kriegserfahrungen: Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Tübingen: Klartext, 1997); for a general *Alltagsgeschichte* of German Jewry, see Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945*. See also Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The *Kriegserlebnis* and Jewish Consciousness," in Wolfgang Benz, Arnold Paucker and Peter Pulzer, eds., *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 225-237. See especially pp. 225-227 where Mendes-Flohr discusses the different nuances of "Erfahrung" and "Erlebnis."

The experience that I describe is restricted to the western and eastern fronts in Europe. I have not looked at the experience of Jewish soldiers and their communities at the home front, which would need to be included in a comprehensive treatment of German Jewry in World War I. Neither have I looked at the experience of Jewish soldiers in the German colonies or on the seas.<sup>68</sup> I have looked at sources on Jewish soldiers in the air war, but that was specific to the western front. Due to the needs of the stalemated trench warfare and unprecedented losses, the overwhelming majority of soldiers in the German army served on the western front. A significant minority did serve on the eastern front, where Jewish soldiers encountered East European Jewry. A chapter is devoted to that specific experience.

### **Situating This Study in the History of the German Jews in World War I**

There are three major areas that have already been discussed in the historiographic literature and to which I have, therefore, not devoted attention in the body of this work. They are the extent and nature of Jewish patriotism, the “Jewish census” (*Juden-zählung*) of the German army in 1916, and the extent of Jewish participation in the German war effort. Some general remarks and observations will follow on these three topics in order to establish the necessary background and groundwork for the argument of this study.

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<sup>68</sup> There is a moving account, in the memorial volume published by the Munich branch of the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, where several pages are devoted to Dr. Ernst Oberndörffner who served in Baghdad. He writes to his adjutant in March 1916, in an account he called “Death in Baghdad,” about an outbreak of typhus. He died immediately thereafter, and the memorial volume contains the eulogy that his adjutant delivered at his grave, including an account of who attended the funeral and the text of the condolence letter to the doctor’s widow written by General Field Marshal Goltz. The funeral was attended by the local Jewish community, German and Austrian diplomats, soldiers of various units, and German and Turkish officers. See *Unseren Gefallenen Kameraden: Gedenkbuch für die im Weltkrieg Gefallenen Münchener Juden* (Munich, 1929), pp. 227-230.

**Jewish Patriotism.** Jews in Germany were no more monolithic, politically, than any other group. There were conservatives and liberals, monarchists and socialists, traditionalists and reformists. The Zionists were the greatest challengers of the mainstream in that they posited a defiant Jewish nationalism that both Jews and non-Jews saw as counterproductive to Jewish efforts to win full acceptance in Germany. For most Jews, the realization of Jewish emancipation was still recent and “full acceptance” was still seen as a cultural ideal. The existence of antisemitism in society and government created obstacles for total Jewish integration. Jews, therefore, welcomed the outbreak of war in 1914 since they saw it as providing an opportunity for them to prove their patriotic loyalty to Kaiser and Fatherland. In other words, the presence of antisemitism only encouraged further Jewish identification with the German Reich. All Jewish groups expressed the support for the war at its outbreak in 1914. “The euphoric display of national unity,” writes Werner T. Angress, “known as the ‘Spirit of 1914,’ cut across all the various religious and ideological groupings of German Jewry, including the Zionists.”<sup>69</sup>

Jeffrey Verhey’s 2000 study, *The Spirit of 1914*, offers an important corrective in reading the initial patriotism that came with the outbreak of war in August of that year. Verhey explains the enthusiasm as a political myth that was more the product of the later years of the war and the following period rather than the days of July and August 1914

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<sup>69</sup> Werner T. Angress, “The German Army’s ‘Juden­zählung’ of 1916: Genesis—Consequences—Significance” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 23 (1978): 118, n. 5. This note cites examples of Jewish patriotic declarations from four German Jewish newspapers representing the Orthodox, Liberal, youth and Zionist movements. For a study of German Jewish patriotism in the periods prior to World War I, see Erik Lindner, *Patriotismus deutscher Juden von der napoleonischen Ära bis zum Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

themselves. By 1917 and 1918 the war and home fronts were becoming destabilized, despite the victory against Russia in the east. The government sought to muster public opinion and support through appeal to the “Great Days” of 1914, at the war’s beginning. Through analysis of the regular newspapers from the various political parties and persuasions, he shows that in July the enthusiastic pro-war crowds were often infused with more people who were curious and anxious about the news of growing tensions rather than any specific outcome on the “stage of Europe.” The SPD (Social Democratic Party), on the other hand, organized anti-war demonstrations that were more numerous than the enthusiastic patriotic crowds. In August, much of the large crowds were more “carnavalesque” and unruly than the patriotic hymnners they are later made out to be. More were anxious about mobilization and concerned about the returning wounded. Verhey argues that the enthusiasm was strong among bourgeois student groups and other educated city populations, but was far less pronounced among the working class and on the land outside the cities. Verhey’s qualifications are confirmed by the work of Benjamin Ziemann, who devotes attention to “war weariness” at the front as well as at home.

While the August enthusiasm may not have been representative of Germany as a whole, it was representative of German Jewry. While politically diverse, German Jewry was characterized by a general social cohesiveness. More than any other group, German Jewry was—or at least imagined itself to be—quintessentially bourgeois. Till van Rahden, in his analysis of Jewish social structure in Breslau, qualifies the class-assumptions of Jews as bourgeois. There were more poor and lower middle class Jews

than the historiographic literature admits.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, he agrees that “due to their income advantage, Jews continued to be markedly overrepresented in...the bourgeois classes.”<sup>71</sup> Jews moved into the cities in search of economic opportunities and cultural attainment. They believed that through the acquisition of German *Kultur* and *Bildung* they would carve out a place for themselves in the modern world. If the German bourgeoisie was invested in the construction of the sense of a German nation, Jewish identity was based on an assimilation of *Germanness*. For this reason alone, Jews welcomed the opportunity brought by the war to act as full Germans.

Kaiser Wilhelm’s famous statement of 4 August 1914, “I no longer recognize any parties; I know only Germans” was music to Jewish ears. As Eva Reichmann describes, in her article on Jewish consciousness during the war: “The words, ‘*Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, ich kenne nur noch Deutsche,*’ with which the German Kaiser gave expression to the national charge for the beginning of the war was received by no section of the community with greater gratitude and joy than by the German Jews.”<sup>72</sup> While the *Burgfrieden* (civic truce) did not last through the duration of hostilities, in 1914 it served only to fuel the already existent fidelity that the Jews felt towards Germany.

A second factor in the war enthusiasm and patriotism of German Jewry was their support for a war against the Tsar. Russia was seen as a menace to its Jewish population, especially since the outbreak of pogrom violence in the late 1880s. “Any sympathy that Liberal Jews might otherwise have had with Britain and France,” writes Peter Pulzer,

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<sup>70</sup> See van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*, ch. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> Eva G. Reichmann, “Der Bewußteinswandel der deutschen Juden” in Mosse, ed., *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution*, p. 513.

“was neutralized by their perfidy in allying with the Tsar.”<sup>73</sup> Germans in general already imagined the Russians as the Asiatic barbarians from the east, as Troy R.E. Paddock argues.<sup>74</sup> All the more so were German Jews ready to fight Russia, the enemy of their coreligionists. For this reason of opposing the Tsar, the Jewish populations in most neutral countries supported the Central Powers, including the American Jewish community until, of course, the entry of the US on the Allied side.<sup>75</sup> German Jews in Germany naturally supported the German war effort with enthusiasm when the war began, for both German and Jewish reasons.

The war letters published by the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten in 1935 are rich with expressions of the “spirit of 1914.” The polemical nature of the editing, demonstrating—in the same year as the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws and retraction of Jewish emancipation—the sincerity of Jewish patriotism, does not detract from the testimony that it records. “Who is not happy to give his life for his beloved German fatherland?” asked Joseph Elkan. “How beautiful it is, to die for one’s fatherland.”<sup>76</sup> “I have performed my duty for the Fatherland,” wrote Gotthold Bronheim, “I have, as a German Jew, defended my Fatherland...I wish it victory.”<sup>77</sup> German Jewish soldiers wrote about “the idealism Fatherland-love”<sup>78</sup> and the “duty towards Fatherland, Emperor and Empire.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, p. 195.

<sup>74</sup> Troy R.E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, The Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial German, 1890-1914* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> The Balfour Declaration of 1917 that articulated British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was intended to woo Jews, specifically American Jews, away from support for Germany.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Elkan to Siegfried, 2 August 1914, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Deutscher Juden* (Berlin: Vortrupp Verlag, 1935) [henceforth *KGDJ*], p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Gotthold Bronheim “Testament,” *KGDJ*, p. 41.

<sup>78</sup> Kurt Simon, Letter dated 1 September 1914, *KGDJ*, p. 72.

<sup>79</sup> Alfred Meyer, Letter dated 21 December 1914, *KGDJ*, p. 57.

Soldiers would often write their families goodbye-letters to be delivered in the event of their deaths. Emil Lewinsohn wrote: “Dearest Parents, If this letter falls into your hands, I am no longer alive, for I have surely fallen with so many of my comrades for the Fatherland...a blessed death.”<sup>80</sup> Hermann Samuel wrote: “My Parents! If you have received this letter, I have offered up my life upon the altar of our Fatherland...the best of deaths!”<sup>81</sup> This language is no different from that that was sent by other educated young men to their loved ones back home. As Walter Roy, a non-Jewish medical student from Jena, wrote just before an attack: “My dear ones, I hope that a trusty comrade will not have to send this letter to you, for it is a farewell letter. If it comes into your hands, you will know that I have died for my Kaiser, for my Fatherland and for you all.”<sup>82</sup>

Many soldiers turned to poetic verse in what Paul Fussell has called the most literary of wars.<sup>83</sup> Jews did so as well, giving expression to the same feelings. Walter Seligsohn concludes his poem, “Lied deutscher Reiter in Polen,” with the verses:

O du fernes deutsches Vaterland!

Werden wir je dich wiedersehen?

(O you far-away German Fatherland!

Will we ever again see one another?)<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Emil Lewinsohn to his parents, n.d. (but he died late August 1914), *KGDJ*, p. 49.

<sup>81</sup> Hermann Samuel, Letter dated 27 November 1914, *KGDJ*, p.68.

<sup>82</sup> Walter Roy, Letter dated 24 April 1914, in Philipp Witkop, ed., *German Students' War Letters*, trans. A.F. Wedd (Philadelphia: Pine St. Books, 2002), p. 70. On the wider context of the generation who wrote these letters, see Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>83</sup> See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>84</sup> Walter Seligsohn, “Lied deutscher Rieter in Polen,” in *KGDJ*, p. 94.

Jewish war enthusiasm would have lessened with everyone else's after the initiation of hostilities and the realization of the realities and sacrifices that the war entailed. Peter Pulzer suggests that Jewish war enthusiasm dissipated earlier than other groups: "What can be said is that if Jews were not exempt from the war euphoria of 1914, they recovered from it more quickly."<sup>85</sup> While there were certainly Jewish voices on the right, most Jews were liberal in politics and looked for peace over hawkish war aims. It is no accident that the Reichsbund chose letters mostly from 1914 to make up its collection published in 1935. A sharp contrast to the patriotic letters can be found in the writings of the Jewish existentialist philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, who wrote to his parents from the western front in 1917, expressing, in poignant irony, the frustration of trench warfare:

War weary? In another twenty-seven years perhaps the whole world, or at least the iron-ore district of Brieg, will have been conquered. Let's hope for the best. To the gallows with the Social Democrats! Ditto all non-Germans outside Germany! Ditto, or more in style, burn everything non-German inside! Until only Count Reventlow [a pan-Germanist] is left to save the world. Feel like vomiting.<sup>86</sup>

The experience of most German Jewish soldiers would have fallen somewhere between the patriotism expressed in the Reichsbund letters collection and the bitter irony of Franz Rosenzweig. While the Jewish community may have welcomed the war with particularly unanimous support, German Jewish soldiers were no different from their comrades in this

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<sup>85</sup> Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, p. 202.

<sup>86</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to his Parents, 23 July 1917, in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 57.

regard. Of immediate concern to soldiers on the front was not national politics, but survival.

**The Judenzählung of 1916.** In 1916 the German army ordered that a census be taken by all commanders of their Jewish soldiers. While the state claimed that it ordered the census to investigate if Jews were participating proportionately in the war, the Jewish community of Germany was outraged. Most interpreters have explained that, whatever the reasons for the Judenzählung, its effects marked the realization that the German Jewish experience, both in the army and in German society in general, would always be dominated by antisemitism. “The German army insisted,” writes Marsha Rozenblit, “that it surveyed the religious distribution of soldiers on the front and behind the lines to give the lie to anti-Semitic charges that Jews shirked military responsibility, but the so-called ‘Jewish census’ humiliated Jewish soldiers, alienated them from their fellow soldiers, and made them feel that their sacrifices for the fatherland had been in vain.”<sup>87</sup> As another example, Aviel Roshwald writes how the “notorious survey of German Jewish participation in the war effort in a transparent attempt to represent the Jews as not contributing their fair share to the nation’s struggle...highlighted the fact that, for all their juridical equality, German Jews were still far from being accepted as integral members of the German national community.”<sup>88</sup> And in Peter Pulzer’s words: “What hit the Jewish population at large like a hammer-blow was the demand for a so-called Jewish

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<sup>87</sup> Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, p. 94.

<sup>88</sup> Aviel Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe During the Great War,” in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 103.

census....Not much remained of the Emperor's assurance that he saw only Germans.”<sup>89</sup>

A number of historians see the Judenzählung as the turning-point in the history of German Jewry. “Following the German Army's ‘Jew count’ of 1916,” write Till van Rahden, “anti-Semitic ideology became more radical and dynamic while also joining forces with völkish nationalism, which seized large segments of the conservative middle class and for which ‘the Jew’ became the ‘ultimate enemy.’”<sup>90</sup> In Christhard Hoffman's judgment, “the year 1916 thus marked a clear turning-point in the history of the German Jews.”<sup>91</sup>

The only full-length study of Jewish soldiers in the German army was published by Jacob Rosenthal in Hebrew in 2005. (A German translation has since appeared.<sup>92</sup>) Rosenthal's focus is on the Judenzählung, although he provides detailed background and context. He makes his interpretive model quite clear, that “if this episode did not perhaps lead in a direct line to the tragic end of German Jewry, it was nevertheless a critical point in the continuity that led to the rise of the Nazis and their eventual seizure of power.”<sup>93</sup>

Rosenthal, the son of a German émigré who served as an Oberleutnant (first lieutenant) in the German army—the volume opens with a picture of his father—wrote his book as a refutation of the conclusion of the scholar who wrote the definitive history

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<sup>89</sup> Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, p. 205.

<sup>90</sup> van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans*, pp. 231-232.

<sup>91</sup> Christhard Hoffmann, “Between Integration and Rejection: The Jewish Community in Germany, 1914-1918,” in John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 103.

<sup>92</sup> Jacob Rosenthal, *Epizodah Shel “Rishes”?* “*Sfirat Hayehudim*” *Bemilhemet Ha’olam Harishonah* [An Episode of “Rishes”? “The Counting of the Jewish Soldiers” in Germany in the First World War] (Jerusalem: Kibbutz Hameuchad and Leo Baeck Institute, 2005); Jacob Rosenthal, “*Die Ehre des jüdischen Soldaten*”: *Die Judenzählung im Ersten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Rosenthal, *Epizodah Shel “Rishes”?*, p. 16.

of the *Judenzählung*, another German Jewish émigré, Werner T. Angress.<sup>94</sup> It is striking to me that the only scholar who clearly discounts the overall significance of the *Judenzählung* in the larger narrative of German Jewish history is the historian who knows it best. At the end of his classic article on the census, Angress writes a critical conclusion that addresses all the historiographical issues that I have tried to outline in this introduction. For this reason alone, it is worth quoting in full:

We may ask, in conclusion, whether the *Judenzählung* was a watershed, a milestone on the road to Auschwitz as has been occasionally maintained. For those who reject the inevitability of human events—and most historians do—the answer must be in the negative. Antisemitism had been a part of the German scene before the First World War and remained a potent force during the brief life of the Weimar Republic, though here, too, its intensity fluctuated. Granted that during the First World War antisemitism had gained new strength, and that the War Ministry's *Erlass* of 11<sup>th</sup> October 1916 [i.e. the order that commanders in the field carry out the census] was a direct outgrowth of this trend. But taken by itself, the *Judenzählung*—a tactless blunder committed by a handful of high-ranking and most probably antisemitic army officers—was a symptom, a warning sign that antisemitism in Germany was alive and well,

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<sup>94</sup> Angress, "The German Army's 'Judenzählung' of 1916: Genesis—Consequences—Significance," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 23 (1978): 117-137.

especially in times of stress and national reverses. More than this it did not signify. If the course of German history during the post-war period had taken a different direction from that which it ultimately did take—and this possibility existed at least until 30<sup>th</sup> January 1933, if not beyond that date—the *Juden­zählung* would have remained a mere episode, a humiliation like others before, remembered with distaste, but ultimately shrugged off as just another manifestation of *Risches* on the part of Wilhelminian Germany’s military élite.<sup>95</sup>

*Risches* is a Yiddish term for “evil.” By choosing to use a Yiddishism there, Angress signifies a “shrugging off.” After his detailed account of the order of 1916 and its context, how antisemitic politicians had convinced the war ministry to issue the order, and how the ministry was immediately criticized in the Reichstag for giving in to antisemitic pressure, Angress argues that it was “just” an episode. That is a conclusion that Rosenthal cannot accept, and yet it forms the foundation upon which my inquiry begins.

I do not here repeat the details of the story of the *Juden­zählung* that Angress tells. What is important to state is that while many Jews were outraged by the order, it does not appear as a dominant theme in the sources that I studied. Most do not mention the census order at all. Throughout the letters and memoirs that I read, 1916 does not appear as a “turning point” as Christhard Hoffmann suggests it should. For this reason, in addition to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

my historiographic position, I am convinced by Angress's judgment that this was a passing episode.

There are also two specific facts that merit consideration in this question. First, the German army's treatment of the Jews was not exceptional, Rosenthal's claims to the contrary notwithstanding. I have already cited the segregationist policies of the US Army in treating its African American soldiers and officers. The German army itself treated another minority—the Alsatians—worse than the Jews. “The High Command considered Alsatians of doubtful loyalty,” writes Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, “unreliable on the Western Front. When regiments were transferred west, Alsatians were humiliated, separated from the ranks, and left behind.”<sup>96</sup> Jews were never segregated in the German army in World War I. Second, not all Jewish soldiers would have responded so negatively to the command to report their religion because those who served in the Bavarian army already did so on the day they enlisted. The Bavarian army personnel records cite religion on the standard questionnaire along with various other personal data. The Berlin command apparently did not ask for as much thorough data as Munich. The Jews did not object, of course, to answering on religion, only to being singled out. My point is simply that it was not out of the ordinary for a military authority to ask one's religion.

**Jewish Participation in the German War Effort.** The results of the *Juden*zählung were never published, and if they ever existed they were destroyed in the Allied bombing of

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<sup>96</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 187. For some reflections on the German identity of Alsatians, see Eric Kurlander, “Völkisch-Nationalism and Universalism on the Margins of the Reich: A Comparison of Majority and Minority Liberalism in Germany, 1898-1933,” in Gregor, Roemer and Roseman, eds., *German History from the Margins*, pp. 84-103.

Berlin and Potsdam in World War II that destroyed the entire archives of the German army. The German Jewish community assumed that the reason why the War Ministry did not publish the results of the census was that it would have proven that Jews were not shirking their responsibility. Significant debate ensued for a decade after the war on what the Jewish participation was, with statisticians from both the Jewish and antisemitic sides publishing their findings. The two most important pamphlets were published by Jacob Segal from the Jewish side and Otto Armin from the antisemitic side.<sup>97</sup> Armin, who claimed to base his work on War Ministry sources from the start of 1917, perhaps even the actual *Juden*zählung data, found that there were 62,515 Jewish soldiers who were serving in the war. However, he argues that over half of them served in the rear, out of harm's way. Jacob Segal, as the director of the Committee on War Statistics set up by the major German Jewish organizations, based his research on the Jewish community's own records. Armin notes the Jewish community's estimate of 100,000 Jews having served in the army, but dismisses that as impossible given that that would constitute a fifth of the Jewish population.<sup>98</sup> In fact, 100,000 would have made up a sixth rather than a fifth of the population. The matter was only "officially" resolved in 1961 when Franz Joseph Strauss, as the West German defense minister, acknowledged, in a preface to a new edition of the Reichsbund's *War Letters of Fallen German Jews*, that "a hundred thousand men of the Jewish faith and Jewish ethnicity wore the grey uniform of the German Empire, more than a third of them were decorated, over 2000 were officers, and 1200 medics. 12,000 Jewish soldiers fell in struggle and good faith for their

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<sup>97</sup> Jacob Segal, *Die deutschen Juden als Soldaten im Kriege 1914-1918: Ein statistische Studie* (Berlin, 1921); Otto Armin, *Die Juden im Heer: Eine statistische Untersuchung nach amtlichen Quellen* (Munich, 1919). Otto Armin was a pseudonym for Alfred Roth. On the controversy, in addition to Rosenthal, *Epizodah Shel "Rishes,"* see Berger, *Eisernes Kreuz und Davidstern*, pp. 171-181.

<sup>98</sup> Armin, *Die Juden im Heer*, p. 17.

Fatherland.”<sup>99</sup> We will probably never know the precise numbers, which are in either case peripheral to my study, which focuses on the nature of the Jewish front experience, not the extent of Jewish contribution to the war effort, whether in men or by other means.

### **Methodological Approaches**

The sources I have used for this study fall into three categories: 1) archival records, 2) literary evidence, and 3) cemetery inscriptions. A word about the types of sources and methodological assumptions follows.

**Archival Records.** As mentioned above, the German military archives were destroyed by Allied bombs in World War II. However, since the Bavarian army was administered independently out of Munich, its archives have always been housed in Munich. Since the Bavarian army was extinct in World War II, the Munich archives did not constitute a military target, and so, with that logic and with some luck, survived the Second World War. The Bavarian Central Archive, Military Section, has only preserved the service records of officers, not non-commissioned officers and enlisted men. In addition to that, although the Bavarian army did ask on its questionnaires for religion, there is no way to search by religion in the archives. To avoid searching blindly for Jewish officers, I resolved to create a representative sample consisting of those Jewish officers in the Bavarian army who had fallen in combat, as recorded in the *Gedenkbuch (Memorial Book)* published by the Reichsbund in 1932. From the 12,000 names in that volume I found fifty-five who were officers in the Bavarian army. Having their names and

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<sup>99</sup> Franz Josef Srauß, foreword to *Kriegsbriefe Gefallener Deutscher Juden* (Stuttgart: Sewwald Verlag, 1961).

birthdates from the *Gedenkbuch*, I was able to access their files in the archive. The information I gathered, unique and invaluable, is presented in the final chapter of this work.

**Literary Evidence.** From archives of the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, I read war memoirs, diaries and letters. In addition to the archival material, I also relied on the significant amount of published letters and memoirs, as well as newspaper accounts. Of the various types of literary sources I used, memoirs are the least trustworthy because they are often written years after the events they relate. Letters offer immediate impressions, but, since they are intended for others, they are not always as unrestrained as diaries. Since letters are the more unique and complicated literary source from the First World War, some more context might be useful.

The war letters of German Jewish soldiers are an important and large body of evidence. Bernd Ulrich, in his study of German war letters, counts no less than 185 collections of letters published in Germany either during the War or the Weimar Republic.<sup>100</sup> In addition to the collections, letters were published regularly in all German newspapers during the War years. Some might question the veracity of the letters as a source of social history because of the extensive military censorship at the time. The German army did exercise censorship of letters from the front, but only for letters to be published by newspapers or other contemporary publications. “Forbidden topics for published collections,” writes Wolfgang G. Natter, “included certain weapons, some

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<sup>100</sup> Bernd Ulrich, *Die Augenzeugen: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe in Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit 1914-1933* (Essen: Klartext, 1997), pp. 315-320.

types of violence, manner and place of death, and political beliefs.”<sup>101</sup> Letters were censored for reasons of both military and political strategy, as well as in efforts to sanitize the war for domestic readers and maintain a sense of morale. Most historians have discounted the concern about censorship. “Newspaper or book editors might have chosen to print certain letters because they supported the themes of wartime propaganda,” Marsha Rozenblit writes. “Yet just because published letters conformed to the official propaganda line did not make them untrue.”<sup>102</sup> Jay Winter even questions the extent of the censorship: “The sheer deluge of letters written home defeated army efforts to sanitize correspondence.”<sup>103</sup> Natter points out that initially the censorship was only for printed letters, and that general letters from the front were only systematically censored beginning in 1916, but even then, “the pure volume of mail hampered efficiency,” he writes.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, argues Bernd Ulrich, the consciousness of impending military censorship must have affected the content of letters.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the methodological question becomes not “What is excised?” but rather “What is omitted?” Through careful reading, Ulrich argues for the usability of war letters as a key primary source for the German war experience. The millions of eyewitness accounts demand greater attention of social historians of the period. A reading of the letters contained in Philip Witkop’s collection, the most famous of German war letters collections and reissued in English as *German Students’ War Letters*, does not show any great “sanitization” of content for a domestic audience. The letters invoke horror and disillusionment even as they extol the

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<sup>101</sup> Wolfgang G. Natter, *Literature at War Literature at War, 1914-1940: Representing the “The Time of Greatness” in Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 86. See pp. 85-90 for his discussion of “censorship and authenticity” of war letters.

<sup>102</sup> Rozenblit, *Reconstructing National Identity*, p. 87.

<sup>103</sup> Jay Winter, “Philipp Witkop and the German ‘Soldier’s Tale,’” introduction to Philip Witkop, *German Student’s War Letters*, p. v.

<sup>104</sup> Natter, *Literature at War*, p. 88.

<sup>105</sup> Ulrich, *Die Augenzeugen*, p. 78.

virtues of their young authors. Enough has clearly escaped the censor to provide an ample documentary source for the social historian of the war experience.

In contrast, Jeffrey Verhey discounts war letters as a key body of evidence not because of their questionable veracity but rather because surviving war letters come mostly from soldiers of the middle and upper classes. “Although there are many letters and diaries in archives and libraries,” he writes, “most of those who wrote diaries and letters in 1914 and, more importantly, who deposited their letters and diaries in libraries and archives, belonged to the middle or upper class, or were soldiers at the front. We lack the letters and diaries of farmers, the working class, the lower middle class, or, in general, of those waiting at home.”<sup>106</sup> War letters do not serve Verhey’s purpose in writing a social history of German public opinion during the War for they are not necessarily representative of German public opinion as a whole. However, they may serve as a usable source for the Jewish war experience since the Jews were also not representative of German public opinion as a whole. While not all Jews were middle class, the Jewish community was overrepresented in the middle classes and perceived of itself as bourgeois. Further limiting our concern to the class of Jewish officers, the letters of Jewish soldiers are an accurate portrayal of their thoughts because one could not become an officer if one came from the lower classes.

Jewish letters were first published in the various Jewish newspapers such as the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* (Liberal), the *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung* (Orthodox), *Im deutschen Reich* (broad spectrum), and others. Letters from the Jewish press from the first year of the war were edited by Eugen Tannenbaum as *Kriegsbriefe*

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<sup>106</sup> Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, p. 13.

*Deutscher und Österreichischer Juden* and published in Berlin in 1915.<sup>107</sup> This collection is directed at a Jewish audience. Most of the letters discuss the Jewish holidays at the front, something that Jews would certainly write home about at holiday time, and that the Jewish press would be interested in printing. The collection seems to have an overrepresentation of Orthodox letters (disproportionate to the minority percentage of Orthodox Jews among German Jewry as a whole), evidenced through the extent of knowledge of Jewish holidays as well as use of technical Jewish and Hebrew vocabulary. The volume even has a glossary of Hebrew terms for the uninitiated reader (that is, probably more for the non-Orthodox Jew than the non-Jew). Also, the inclusion of Austrian material qualifies the volume's usefulness as a representative sample of German Jewry. Nevertheless, the volume serves as a fascinating collection of material if used carefully. The Tannenbaum collection serves as a significant source for my discussion of religion at the front in the following chapter.

Jewish letters are also collected in the 1935 volume edited by the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Deutscher Juden*. Because that collection is edited by the organization of Jewish war veterans during the Nazi Reich in order to propagandize against the claims of the antisemites, the letters are more concerned with telling the story of Jewish sacrifice and suffering for Germany rather than invigorating war morale when the war was still being fought.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, while the letters are chosen with a particular editorial purpose in mind, there may even be less

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<sup>107</sup> Tannenbaum identifies his sources as including: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, *Gemeindeblatt der jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin*, *Im Deutschen Reich*, *Israelit*, *Israelitisches Familienblatt-Hamburg*, *Jüdische Rundschau*, and others (foreword, p. ii).

<sup>108</sup> See Ruth Pierson, "Embattled Veterans: The Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 19 (1974): 139-154, which places the organization of German Jewish war veterans into the context of the struggle against antisemitism. See also Caplan, "Wicked Sons, German Heroes."

ensorship of the actual letters in a volume such as this, which was not limited to letters chosen for print in German newspapers during the War but also contained letters given to the Reichsbund by private individuals. Analysis of the place of birth of the soldiers cited in this volume shows extensive geographic and demographic dispersion. That is, the letter writers came from small towns and large cities, and from all parts of the German Empire.

An archive of previously unpublished letters addressed by former residents of a Berlin Jewish orphanage to their former director, Sigmund Feist, has been published, meticulously edited, organized and annotated by Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon.<sup>109</sup> Since Dr. Feist saved his correspondence, and the editors of these volumes have sought to be as thorough as possible in publishing the collection, this collection is particularly useful since there is no concern here for censorship save the initial military censor. Because Dr. Feist's letters were sent to him rather than chosen for publication, there is a mixture between substantive letters and letters of lesser interest, such as acknowledgments of receipt of various gifts.<sup>110</sup>

“Nearly every societal group had its own edition of war letters,” writes Ulrich Sieg. The war letters were collected and published as representative samples of group identities because, as Sieg posits, “War letters were the principal mass source for the war experiences of soldiers.”<sup>111</sup>

In addition to letters, memoirs and diaries, I used German Jewish newspapers, relying heavily on the pages of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, the most widely

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<sup>109</sup>Sabine Hank and Herman Simon, eds., *Feldpostbriefe Jüdischer Soldaten 1914-1918* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), henceforth “Hank and Simon.”

<sup>110</sup>See Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg*, pp. 118-122, for a survey of the above-mentioned sources on Jewish war letters.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

circulated German Jewish newspaper, for reports from the front and various letters that it sometimes printed. The *Allgemeine Zeitung* would regularly cite articles from other papers, both Jewish and general German papers, making it an excellent representative source. The *Allgemeine Zeitung* was especially useful in providing regular reports from chaplains in the field.

**Cemetery Inscriptions.** In the final chapter of this study I analyze data on the ranks of Jewish soldiers that I culled from the gravestones of the Jewish military cemeteries in Frankfurt and Berlin. Because cemetery evidence is not usually used as a source in modern history—epigraphical sources are critical in ancient history—some context on the nature of military cemeteries follows.

Most Jewish cemeteries in Germany have military sections where Jewish soldiers who served and fell in World War I are buried. The literature on Jewish *Friedhofskultur* (cemetery culture) does not pay much attention to the military sections of Jewish cemeteries. Great effort has gone into the documentation of the various Jewish cemeteries throughout Germany, and a recent comprehensive volume by Michael Brocke and Christiane Müller catalogues much of this information on each Jewish cemetery in Germany.<sup>112</sup> However, while all major (and many minor) Jewish cemeteries in Germany contain either a World War I memorial or an actual mini-military cemetery within, this widespread phenomenon has been hardly noticed. Brocke and Müller sometime mention in passing that a World War I section remains, but they are inconsistent. Israel Schwierz,

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<sup>112</sup>Michael Brocke and Christiane E. Müller, *Haus des Lebens: Jüdische Friedhöfe in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Reclam, 2001). See also Reiner Sörries, “Jüdische Friedhöfe in Deutschland,” in *Raum für Tote. Die Geschichte der Friedhöfe von der Gräberstraßen der Römerzeit bis zur anonymen Bestattung* edited by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Friedhof und Denkmal Zentralinstitut und Museum für Sepulkalkultur Kassel (Branschweig: Thalacker Medien, 2003), pp. 239-254.

however, has published an entire volume on monuments to Jewish soldiers of the First World War in Bavaria, while Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon have published a volume on the military cemetery within Berlin's massive Weissensee cemetery.<sup>113</sup>

The Jewish military cemeteries, even though placed within Jewish cemeteries, look like all military cemeteries. There is a central monument, and then rows of uniform stones with uniform inscriptions, differing only on the particulars. The military cemetery in general developed in Europe as a whole only with the First World War. The first modern military cemeteries were in the USA and arose during the Civil War. Arlington itself was founded in 1864. The development was a result of massive modern war with enormous casualties who were mourned for by the citizenry as a whole. Prior to this time, warfare cost fewer casualties and was fought predominantly by professional mercenaries. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 brought some of the American Civil War experience to Europe, but it was only with World War I that the loss of war's carnage was felt in every town and village, by a relative of every family. George Mosse has done pioneering work in tracing the development of military cemeteries as part of the phenomenon of the cult of the fallen soldier, an important aspect of modern nationalism. He relates how soldiers from earlier wars were simply buried in mass graves at the battlefield, such as in the Napoleonic wars.<sup>114</sup> The growth of military cemeteries was also encouraged, Mosse argues, by developments in cemetery design over the course of the nineteenth century. The opening of the Pere Lachaise cemetery outside Paris in 1804

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<sup>113</sup> Israel Schwierz, "*Für das Vaterland starben...*": *Denkmale und Gedenktafeln bayerisch-jüdischer Soldaten* (Aschaffenburg/Main: Eduard Krem-Bardischewski Verlag, 1998); Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon, "*Bis der Krieg uns lehrt, was der Friede bedeutet*": *Das Ehrenfeld für die jüdischen Gefallenen des Weltkrieges auf dem Friedhof der Berliner Jüdischen Gemeinde* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2004).

<sup>114</sup> See George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), ch. 3.

marked the first major cemetery to be built outside a city, leaving the churchyard for the pastoral quietude of nature. The “Garden Cemetery Movement,” while having roots in eighteenth century French rationalism and anti-clericalism, was also influenced by patterns found in the USA.<sup>115</sup> Mosse looks to the Mount Auburn cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as influential in what was called the “Park Cemetery Movement.” The phenomenological change in relation to death which Mosse touches upon is the secularizing focus on the peace of nature rather than the salvational promise of church burial. Mosse extends this argument to military cemeteries, implying that national cemeteries became the national holy ground upon which the cult of the fallen soldier was observed.

Some historians such as Norbert Fischer have expanded on Mosse’s work.<sup>116</sup> However, most literature on the history of cemetery design is written by architectural historians who are concerned more with the questions of design and their influences on other designs than on the greater questions of war experience that Mosse engages.<sup>117</sup>

During World War I and its aftermath the Great Powers institutionalized the burial and care for the remains of their forces. The British War Graves Commission, founded in 1917, was the most extensive of these official efforts, seeking responsibility for all Commonwealth military burials.<sup>118</sup> Its German equivalent, the Volksbund

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<sup>115</sup> See Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of The Cemetery in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Cambridge: MIT, 1984).

<sup>116</sup> Norbert Fischer, “Der uniformierte Tod: Soldatenfriedhöfe,” in *Raum für Tote*, pp. 255-264.

<sup>117</sup> See Edwin Heathcote, *Monument Builders: Modern Architecture and Death* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1999); James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture: An Introduction to Funerary and Commemorative Buildings in the Western European Tradition with Some Consideration of Their Settings* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2002).

<sup>118</sup> See Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth’s Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989).

Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, which still exists today, preserves German military cemeteries in Germany and other countries.<sup>119</sup>

Rather than develop “national cemeteries” on the American or British model, German military cemeteries were contained within local cemeteries. Since Jews have traditionally buried their dead separately, and since the general cemeteries were Christian, a Jewish soldier would automatically be buried in a Jewish cemetery, if one were available. However, all those buried in city and town cemeteries in Germany were soldiers who died at home or in hospital. Most deaths in the field were buried at the front in mass mixed-faith cemeteries.<sup>120</sup>

The Jewish military cemeteries in Frankfurt and Berlin are described in the final chapter where I utilize the data from those stones to offer some quantitative grounds for establishing successful Jewish integration in the army. The soldiers buried there mostly died in hospitals having already returned—wounded—from the front. Their numbers are compared to other listings of Jewish officers and soldiers to demonstrate a significant ratio of Jews serving as officers over enlisted men.

### **Jewish at the Front: The Argument**

The story that I seek to tell in the following three chapters argues for Jewish integration in the army, acceptance of a particular Jewish identity but an amalgamation of that identity to being German. Chapter Two examines the experience of religion at the front. Jewish holidays offered an opportunity for Jewish soldiers to seek solace in their

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<sup>119</sup> See *Dienst am Menschen—Dienst am Frieden: 75 Jahre Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (Güttersloh, 1994), as well as the Volksbunde’s useful website: [www.volksbund.de](http://www.volksbund.de).

<sup>120</sup> See John Garfield, *The Fallen: A Photographic Journey Through the War Cemeteries and Memorials of the Great War, 1914-18* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 2003).

religion and camaraderie with their fellow Jews. The Christian holidays posed a challenge in how to celebrate with their Christian comrades. Jewish soldiers did celebrate Christmas, but with some detachment. Jewish soldiers were also able to “read” the Christian symbolism of sacrifice as it was used at the front, although with careful distance. In Chapter Three I discuss the encounter of German Jewish soldiers with Eastern European Jews on the eastern front. Jewish soldiers responded to the Eastern Jews either positively, negatively, or indifferently, but always with distance. The encounter often intensified their own Jewish identity, and yet the Eastern Jew remained as “Other,” even if an ethnic “grandparent.” In the final chapter I discuss experiences of antisemitism—excluding the *Judenählung*—and integration. Narrative anecdotal evidence is mixed with quantitative evidence culled from the cemeteries, published sources and archival material in order to clarify the extent of Jewish integration in the German army. I find that Jewish soldiers found integration and that antisemitism was not a significant factor in their war experience. There was a war where they found themselves as Jews, men, soldiers and Germans, fighting for a future that might have been.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RELIGION AT THE FRONT

Jewish identity was primarily a religious identity for Jewish soldiers in the German army. Jewish soldiers in the German army did not think of themselves as a distinct nationality. As a consequence of the integration of German Jewry in German society and the reforms of German Judaism itself, Judaism, once a national identity, became a matter of “religion” alone. The Jewishness of the German soldiers was ephemeral rather than essential to their identity and how they experienced the war. While the experience of war at the front provided an opportunity for camaraderie that surpassed religious and other divisions between soldiers, religious life at the front did enable soldiers to differentiate themselves. Observance of the Jewish holidays, while tying Jewish soldiers to their home communities in Germany, distinguished them from their Christian comrades. Christian holidays, on the other hand, brought the entire soldier communities together in ways that challenged the religious identities of Jewish soldiers. The allure of Christian tradition was further felt in the way that Christian symbolism was used to explain and understand the sacrifices that the war effort entailed. How Jewish soldiers navigated between religious traditions can help us understand the nature of their identity as Jews and Germans, and how they were able to exist as Jews within a Christian culture.

The letters that Jewish soldiers wrote home describing how Jewish holidays were celebrated at the front were of great interest to the Jewish press at the time. Jewish families and communities were comforted in knowing that their sons, away at the front,

were not only defending their country but also keeping their religious traditions even while their places were empty at family tables. Published collections and Jewish newspapers printed letters having to do with holidays, and newspapers regularly published reports from Jewish chaplains such as Rabbi Leo Baeck on holidays at the front. These published sources, with other letters, diaries and memoirs, paint a vivid picture of the state of Jewish religion in the German army.

Ludwig Goldschmidt, a Jewish university student from Nuremberg and son of a physician, wrote in September 1914: “Now during this time of our High Holidays I am especially conscious not only of victory and happy return home, but rather also of using these days to purify my soul.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than endanger his spiritual life, the war intensified it. Goldschmidt had enlisted in the army as a one-year-volunteer in October of 1913, prior to the outbreak of war. By July of 1914 he had already been promoted to “Unteroffizier” (a non-commissioned officer) and his almost full year of army duty had prepared him for immediate wartime service. He earned the Iron Cross second class in December 1914, was promoted to lieutenant in June 1915, and inducted into the Bavarian Order of Military Service in March 1916. Three months later he was killed in the battle of the Somme.<sup>2</sup> What his letter reveals beyond his service record is his spiritual condition. Son of a physician, the humanities student--plunged into the barbarity of war--reflected on the condition of his soul. Noteworthy is the effect of the Jewish high holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in the early months of the war. While he does not testify to any specific religious observances, he clearly noticed the passage of time, perhaps imagining marking the Jewish new year and day of atonement with his

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Goldschmidt, letter dated 17 September 1914, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Deutscher Juden* (Berlin, 1935) [henceforth *KGDJ*], p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, Officer File 67885.

family in Nuremberg. He yearns for victory so that the war will end, and happy return home, but while he is at war, the passage of the holidays renews and “purifies” or restores his soul.

Jewish soldiers were mindful of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in 1914. For some, like Ludwig Goldschmidt, the holidays may have reminded them of times back home. For others, it renewed the soldierly spirit. Fritz Herz, a Jewish soldier from Wiesbaden, wrote home on 20 September 1914: “At 10:45am I received, along with only four others from the battalion, the Iron Cross. Today, on Rosh Hashanah!...My joy is immense, that it was precisely on our New Year’s Day, that I received this.”<sup>3</sup> Another letter from an unknown Jewish soldier tells about his great luck of finding several other Jews with whom to organize a service for Rosh Hashanah, goes into detail on the various religious aspects of the service, evidencing his own religious background, and concludes that “the most beautiful part of it all was that one of the twelve of us had earned the Iron Cross.”<sup>4</sup> Jews, as all German soldiers, held the Iron Cross in awe. The Jewish newspapers often advertised when Jews received the honor.<sup>5</sup> Jews sometimes put the Iron Cross into their tombstone design if they had earned it, unusual though it is to find crosses in Jewish cemeteries. (See Appendix, Figure 1.) One need only look at the famous photograph of Richard Stern proudly wearing his Iron Cross in the doorway of his shop during the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933 to understand the powerful symbolism that the Iron Cross held for Germans, and especially for German

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<sup>3</sup> Fritz Herz, letter dated 20 September 1914, Eugen Tannenbaum, ed., *Kriegsbriefe Deutscher und Österreichischer Juden* (Berlin, 1915), pp. 28-29. In fact, it was the eve of the Jewish new year.

<sup>4</sup> Letter dated 23 September 1914, Tannenbaum, *Kriegsbriefe*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> See *Fighting for the Fatherland: The Patriotism of Jews in World War I*, Leo Baeck Institute exhibition catalogue (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1999), p. 7, for an offset of a page from the *Israelitische Familienblatt* from 3 October 1918, which pictures sixteen Jews who received the Iron Cross First Class with the caption “Jüdische Ritter”—Jewish knights.

Jews (Appendix, Figure 2). The Iron Cross became a sacred icon. At the front, the honor of serving Kaiser and Fatherland became merged with the honor of serving God. Rosh Hashanah 1914, the solemn Jewish High Holiday that inaugurates the year with penitential prayers and the blowing of the ram's horn (shofar), was the first religious moment of the war for German Jews. As such it was a most appropriate time to celebrate those young soldiers who had already earned their Iron Crosses. Nowhere does there seem to be a perceived conflict between pride in a decoration that is a cross, the most obvious of all Christian symbols, with the Jewish high holiday. Rather than interfere or conflict with German identity, Judaism at the front seemed to make room for the soldier's world, German and Christian as it was.

Although the Jews made up a small minority in the army, Jewish chaplains were commissioned immediately by the armed forces to minister to Jewish soldiers. By December of 1914, only five months into the war, there were already ten rabbis serving in the field.<sup>6</sup> Army chaplain Dr. Baerwald reports in the Jewish press on his activities at Rosh Hashanah services in 1914 for “our brave Bavarian troops” in Metz: “An unusual sight this field service...at least 200 soldiers from all army units were here assembled for prayer, from the youngest recruits to bearded militiamen, some newly dressed in their uniforms, some wounded, and some bearing the strain of long marches and the trenches.”<sup>7</sup> Baerwald's vivid impressions of this high holiday service gathering in Metz is telling because of the famous tapestry of a Yom Kippur service in Metz in 1870 that

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<sup>6</sup>“Die jüdische Feldseelsorge im deutschen Heer,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* [henceforth *AZdJ*], 4 December 1914, p. 584 (erroneously printed as 484).

<sup>7</sup>*AZdJ* 13 November 1914, p. 544. This report from Baerwald appeared earlier in the Jewish newspaper *Im Deutschen Reich*.

was widely copied at the time (Appendix, Figure 3).<sup>8</sup> That well-known image shows 1200 Jewish soldiers participating in an outdoor Yom Kippur service. In his study of German Jewry, Amos Elon qualifies the image with testimony from the time that there were perhaps but sixty soldiers actually present for the service that took place “in a small house with broken-down doors, shattered windows, and walls riddled with shells.”<sup>9</sup> What may have been overrepresented in the Franco-Prussian War in the interests of Jewish pride was reality in 1914. There are photographic images of Jewish religious gatherings in the German army in the First World War that match Baerwald’s early description. About 350 soldiers are photographed at a Rosh Hashanah service elsewhere in Ghent in Belgium in 1915.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps a hundred soldiers are pictured in a photograph of a military service on Yom Kippur in Brussels in 1915 (Appendix, Figure 4).<sup>11</sup> Eighteen Jewish soldiers are pictured with Rabbi Jacob Sanger under the caption: “Religious service in the 11<sup>th</sup> Army.”<sup>12</sup> Some two hundred soldiers are pictured at a Passover seder in a warehouse near the front in 1916 (Appendix, Figure 5).<sup>13</sup> Hundreds of soldiers are pictured at Jewish service in a forest clearing in 1916.<sup>14</sup> Over fifty soldiers appear in a Passover service at the western front in 1917.<sup>15</sup> And as many as 1600 German soldiers, a greater number than in the 1870 illustration, appear at a Rosh

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Nachum T. Gidal, *Die Juden in Deutschland von der Romerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik* (Koln: Konemann, 1997), jacket cover illustration and p. 231; Ruth Gay, *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All: A History of the Jews in Germany 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), p. 203, citing *AZdJ* from 1870. See Elon, p. 416, n. 53. For the image, see p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> *AZdJ*, 8 October 1915, p. 490.

<sup>11</sup> *Fighting for the Fatherland*, Leo Baeck Institute exhibition catalogue, cover. The photograph is also published in Monika Richarz, ed., *Judisches Leben in Deutschland: Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979), p. 455, and originally in *Israelitisches Familienblatt* 7 October 1915.

<sup>12</sup> *AZdJ*, 19 November 1915, p. 561.

<sup>13</sup> *Fighting for the Fatherland*, Leo Baeck Institute exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *AZdJ*, 7 July 1916, p. 318.

<sup>15</sup> *AZdJ*, 4 May 1917, p. 214.

Hashanah service at the Somme in 1916 (Appendix, Figure 6).<sup>16</sup> This photographic record, but a small sampling of what was happening in the field, is complemented by written reports by the Jewish chaplains that are published in the Jewish press throughout the war. In World War I the Jews had become a part of the German army, and the observance of Jewish holidays with public services were a fact of army life.

Chaplain Baerwald may or may not have been aware of the overrepresentation of Jewish soldiers in the famous tapestry of the German Yom Kippur service in Metz in 1870, but he was surely cognizant of that image. “Forty-four years ago,” he writes in 1914 after officiating at Rosh Hashanah services in Metz, “our troops celebrated Yom Kippur in Metz. It is due to the success of their courage that we could celebrate this Rosh Hashanah in Metz again.”<sup>17</sup> While the intent of the artist of the 1870 tapestry may have been to signify the participation of Jews in the German forces that established the German Empire, Chaplain Baerwald’s intention in 1914 was to memorialize not that Jews could celebrate Rosh Hashanah in the army, but that they could do so *in Metz*, that is, in France, taking part in what appeared at the beginning of the war to be an imminent German victory. Baerwald takes for granted that Jews can gather to worship. What he is more amazed at is the (what we know was just initial) swift, successful mobility of the German army. As such, his remarks indicate how far Jews, and Judaism, had become integrated by the First World War into the culture and nationalism of the German Empire.

Rabbi Leo Baeck, the most well-known of World War I German Jewish field chaplains because of his leadership of German Jewry into the Nazi period (and for the institute devoted to the study of German Jewish history that bears his name), reported

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<sup>16</sup> *AZdJ*, 10 November 1916, p. 536. See pp. 535-536 for article.

<sup>17</sup> *AZdJ*, 13 November 1914, p. 544.

how he had convinced the army command to allow a one day's leave for Jewish soldiers from 5pm on Tuesday to 7pm on Wednesday for the observance of Yom Kippur in September 1914. On 28 September, the day before Yom Kippur eve, Rabbi Baeck secured the use of a portion of the church of Notre Dame in Chauny for his Yom Kippur service, as it was the only appropriate building for the service between the hospital and the army camp. He had scheduled a service for Yom Kippur eve at 5:30pm, and for Yom Kippur morning at 9am, but added a closing service (Ne'ilah) at 4:30pm at the request of the soldiers. Thirty-five to forty men attended the three services, consisting of enlisted men of various ranks as well as physicians. They used a section of the church away from the altar and other Christian sacramental symbols, but well lit with candles and ringing with the voices of Jewish prayer.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas Jewish accommodation of the symbol of the Iron Cross as national rather than Christian was already noted above, in this case there are Christians, albeit the German occupying military authorities, allowing a portion of a church to be utilized for a non-Christian service. Leo Baeck continued to use the church in Chauny for Sabbath services.<sup>19</sup> Religious space was shared in wartime.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes in war, space and symbols are shared unintentionally. The Jewish soldier Julius Marx, for example, was shocked when he came upon a grave marked "Here lies Gefreiter Marx." Striking as it is to find one's own name on a tombstone (although Marx already knew that his name was both common and famous), he reacts instead to the

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<sup>18</sup> *AZdJ*, 27 November 1914, p. 569. (The page is erroneously printed as 469.)

<sup>19</sup> Walter H. Herrstadt, letter dated December 1914, *KGDJ*, pp. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. George L. Mosse's remarks: "Some sermons of Jewish chaplains show a confusion of Christian symbolism and Jewish identity, especially as services at the front were sometimes held in Churches." (George L. Mosse, "The Jews and the German War Experience 1914-1918," *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture* 21 [1977]: 11).

combination of the Jewish name and the cross: “A Jewish soldier under a wooden cross!”<sup>21</sup> Burial had to be done expediently in war, at times without thought to religious difference. (And for all we know, the buried Marx may have been Christian.)

Intentional interfaith burial was a different matter. Leo Baeck, in the same report on using the church in Chauny, explains how he has officiated at funeral services at mass graves, along with a Protestant and Catholic chaplain.<sup>22</sup> Not only were such interreligious services rare in peacetime, but specifically in burial Jewish tradition prefers that Jews be buried in exclusively Jewish cemeteries. Christian cemeteries similarly did not permit non-Christian burial, but this too was allowed in wartime.<sup>23</sup> The exigencies of war allowed for an increase in ecumenical and interfaith cooperation and sharing that was unknown in peacetime. Jewish chaplain Georg Wilde reported burying a Jewish, a Catholic and a Protestant soldier together who all died the same day in the field hospital. As there was no other chaplain there, he buried the three together. He said the Kaddish (Jewish memorial) prayer over the Jewish soldier, but then the Priestly Blessing over all three, in Hebrew and German.<sup>24</sup> The realities of war and conditions at the front necessitated practical mass and interfaith burial. What is especially noteworthy is the religious context where Jewish, Protestant and Catholic chaplains, mirroring the bodies of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish soldiers, could stand together and invoke God’s blessings upon those who had fallen for the Fatherland. A photographic image of this wartime interfaith ecumenism from 1916 shows a Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplain co-

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<sup>21</sup> Julius Marx, *Kriegstagebuch eines Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Ner Tamid Verlag, 1964), p. 33, entry for 11 October 1914.

<sup>22</sup> *AZdJ*, 27 November 1914, p. 570 (erroneously printed as 470).

<sup>23</sup> See *AZdJ*, 18 December 1914, p. 603 (erroneously printed as 503), for a report copied from the *Badischen Beobachters* from 4 December 1914, on a city ordinance in Karlsruhe permitting burial of Jewish soldiers in the military section (“Ehrenplatz”) of the city’s (Christian) cemetery, recognizing that fallen Jewish soldiers were “Israelites of a Christian character.”

<sup>24</sup> *AZdJ*, 15 January 1915, p. 31.

officiating at the swearing-in ceremony of a field artillery regiment in Halle.<sup>25</sup> Another from the eastern front shows a rabbi, priest and pastor standing together as colleagues (Appendix, Figure 7).<sup>26</sup> The inscription above the famous 1870 tapestry of the Yom Kippur service at Metz quotes the Bible (Malachi) as asking, “Have we not all one father?”<sup>27</sup> In the First World War that question had been answered in the ecumenical affirmative. Not only the Jewish chaplains, but the Catholic and Protestant ones as well, stood together representing the three “confessions” of German soldiers, praying to the same “father.” The more that Jews and Judaism were accepted into the culture of the army, the more that Judaism and Jewish chaplains were able to stand as equals with their Protestant and Catholic colleagues.<sup>28</sup>

In a poem “The Three Dead,” a Jewish lawyer and lieutenant from Cologne explores this interfaith image of a dead Protestant, Catholic and Jew buried together (with rhyming verse in the original German): “By chance hit by grenade / they do not ask about the Gospel / They ask not if the Pope or Luther is true / for the third one is a Jew....The Jew and the Christians for eternity / ... They all believe in one God / found the same fiend in this spot / We make the same rose for them here / Would this remain, at home, in the Empire!”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Friede unter den Konfessionen auch in der Garnison,” *AZdJ*, 26 May 1916, p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> “Konfessionelle Verbrüderung im Felde,” *AZdJ*, 11 June 1915, p. 279.

<sup>27</sup> See Elon, *The Pity of it All*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>28</sup> The image of a Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplain standing together foreshadows Will Herberg’s 1950s description of American religion where Judaism stood alongside Protestantism and Catholicism as one of the three mainstream “confessions,” to use the German term. See Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955). This interfaith image of society has found recent echoes in scholarship, including Till van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer: Die Beziehungen zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), and David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Schrammen, “Drei Tote!” *AZdJ*, 7 July 1916, p. 323.

The Yom Kippur services in the church of Notre Dame in Chauny led by Leo Baeck marked a significant if symbolic moment where Jewish soldiers felt their Judaism accepted by the larger army, and by implication, German Imperial culture. A soldier stationed by Chauny wrote home about the Catholic field chaplain in Chauny preparing the church for Rabbi Baeck's Yom Kippur service, and "asking about the names and meaning of the Jewish [*israelitischen*] festivals." He summarizes Baeck's sermon, that all peoples and all confessions believe in God, so the question in wartime is not "Is God with us?" but rather, "Are we with God?" Historian George L. Mosse suggests that Baeck's field sermons, reflecting the ethical ideals of Reform Judaism, dwelt on universalism and lack of national chauvinism.<sup>30</sup> All have access to God, according to Baeck, not just Jews, not just Germans. Whether or not that sentiment was shared by all who attended Baeck's service, it made an impression upon the letter-writer, who goes on to remark how meaningful the service was, with a chaplain, a sermon, psalms and singing. "We have [religious field services] truly like the Christian soldiers."<sup>31</sup> In the eyes of the letter-writer, God, like public religion, was no longer exclusive to Christians.

Regular duties of the Jewish military chaplains included weekly Sabbath services for soldiers, ministering to the wounded and burial. Jewish soldiers were generally permitted to attend Sabbath services.<sup>32</sup> The importance of these services for Jewish soldiers, the accessibility of the Jewish observance and symbols in war, cannot be understated for young soldiers living in the trenches. A seventeen-year-old volunteer describes attending a service led by Leo Baeck on 6 February 1915 in a French school in

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<sup>30</sup> "Chauvinism of any kind," writes Mosse, "is rejected by Baeck, but accepted by nearly all of his Christian colleagues." (Mosse, "Jews and the German War Experience," p. 13)

<sup>31</sup> "Feldpostbriefe," *AZdJ* 8 January 1915, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from "a Jewish officer of the Bavarian Army," *AZdJ*, 26 February 1915, p. 98,

Longwy attended by about fifty men consisting of some noncommissioned officers, various enlisted men, as well as a physician. After completing a three-month tour in the trenches, the letter writer attended Baeck's service with his unit commander, a Jewish Unteroffizier wearing his Iron Cross on his chest, as well as a number of other soldiers. He describes the service and Leo Baeck:

The service...was so beautiful. I did not believe that I, who had been brought up so free of religion, could be so moved. Herr Dr. Baeck appeared to me as a prophet. He spoke so earnestly, so confidently, so warmly and fatherly, so purely human [*so rein menschlich*], briefly and directly, divine [*göttlich*]. His words struck our hearts. Now for the first time I feel what religion is and what religion is called....After the service the rabbi remained a while with us, appearing as an angel....Here was the spiritual and the human in one person. Hopefully we will soon have another such service. I lie now again in my trench. Before my soul shines always the patriarchal image of Rabbi Dr. Baeck.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, Leo Baeck, and the service he provided, filled a need for young Jewish soldiers, even those with little to no religious upbringing. Noteworthy is that the aspects that appealed to the young letter-writer were not specifically Jewish. He was struck by the sermon about religion, with the aesthetic beauty of the service and with the person of the chaplain. The letter writer must come from a minimal Jewish background, for he

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<sup>33</sup> "Ein Kriegsfreiwilliger über den Feldgottesdienst," *AZdJ*, 12 March 1915, p. 123.

responds only to the general spiritual elements of Baeck's message. Most telling of all, he clings to the personhood of the chaplain as "divine" and "the spiritual and the human in one person." Leo Baeck has become for this Jewish soldier nothing less than a living substitute for Christ. Baeck served for him as a religious symbol that he could rely upon during his duty in the trenches, exemplifying the powerful and important role of the chaplain.

Leo Baeck describes his preparations and activities for Passover in April 1915. Since he could not be everywhere at the same time, he organized several small Passover celebrations throughout the week of Passover for holding a Seder (the Passover eve table liturgy). By army command, Jewish soldiers were given leave for religious observance for the first two and the last two days of Passover, in accord with traditional Jewish practice, much as Christian soldiers were given time to observe Christmas and Easter. Baeck describes how he taught the message of Freedom during the festival, and how freedom was being fought for by the soldiers. Unlike the political freedom gained by the Israelites escaping Egypt, the German army fights for the idea of Freedom, a substantive idea that can be enjoyed by all humanity.<sup>34</sup> While demonstrating the universalistic trend of Reform Judaism over particularistic Jewish concerns, Baeck simultaneously betrays his rootedness in the liberal nationalism that had enlisted so many German intellectuals at the start of the war. Germany was the nation of *Kultur* fighting against aggressors who posed spiritual (i.e. cultural) as well as political threats, whether the autocratic barbarism

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<sup>34</sup> *AZdJ*, 21 May 1915, p. 244. Baeck's report was dated 16 April 1915.

of tsarist Russia or the mere “civilization” of France, which was only “cultured” on the surface. Germany fought for a spiritual Freedom of culture.<sup>35</sup>

A more mundane reading of Passover is expressed by the twenty-year-old soldier Robert Tiegel of Nuremberg, who writes that while he did not go to any Seder observance on Passover, on Easter Sunday he reflected on “the parallels between the bread of the exodus from Egypt and our army rations.”<sup>36</sup> Whereas Baeck preached about the “bread of redemption,” Tiegel reflected on the “bread of affliction.” The symbol of the matzah lends itself to both this negative and positive valence.

Robert Tiegel was ambivalent about religion and religious ritual. Unlike the volunteer who was enamored with the image of Leo Baeck, Tiegel came from a practicing Jewish family in Nuremberg. He wrote to his family on 1 December 1914 how he expected them soon to be celebrating Hanukkah. He thanks Elsbeth [his sister?] for sending him the beautiful Hanukkah candles, “But I believe that this time,” he writes, “I will not be celebrating Hanukkah, but rather Christmas with my comrades, but not as a Christian, but as a German holiday.”<sup>37</sup> He had no interest in Christianity; he had a waning interest in Judaism. At the front, religion for him seemed less relevant. He writes tellingly of his feelings on Yom Kippur in 1915:

Yesterday I received a long letter from my brother  
containing the contents of three Yom Kippur sermons. It  
was 3:30 in the middle of the night. I was dead tired

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<sup>35</sup> See Thomas Mann’s *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* for the most articulate example of the struggle of Gemran *Kultur* against French “civilization.” On German views of Russia as the representative of the uncivilized “Orient,” see Troy E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, The Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890-1914* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Tiegel, letter dated 7 April 1915, *KGDJ*, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Tiegel, letter dated 1 December 1914, *KGDJ*, p. 88.

coming from the trenches, where I must stay awake early in the morning and at nights for six hours at a time as our enemies might attack....The wisdom of Love and Death was ringing in my insides, and from a stark festive faith I observed my first true and inner Day of Atonement....I am heading out on what will perhaps be the most difficult days....I trust that God will be with us.<sup>38</sup>

There is bitterness in his writing, as well as despair. He wants to hope but can no longer easily find the meaning in religion with which he was raised. The content of the Yom Kippur sermons that his brother sent him were meaningless to him. Two days later, in a letter which he notes in the date falls on Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles), he writes about how English soldiers invaded his trench and engaged in a seven-hour bloody hand-to-hand combat until the German soldiers were able to repel the attackers.<sup>39</sup> One wonders whether he intended to reflect on the parallel symbolism of the sukkah, the temporary dwelling huts used by Jews in the festival of Sukkot, and the trenches. In the sukkah, one is supposed to feel the security of God's embrace, something which Tiegel did not feel in his trench.

Historian Benjamin Ziemann writes about a "crisis of piety" that became widespread among German soldiers in 1916 and lasted through the war. The "initial religious zeal" that followed the quick German advance had diminished with the onset of positional trench warfare, and soldiers began to doubt their faith, or lose it entirely.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Tiegel, letter dated 23 September 1915, *KGDJ*, p. 89.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Tiegel, letter dated 25 September 1915, *KGDJ*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 127.

Some soldiers maintained their faith, but most soldiers “had to suffer the fact that their prayers went unanswered.” Such was especially difficult for the rural soldiers that Ziemann studied, for whom “faith was often underpinned by a highly mechanistic conception of religion.”<sup>41</sup> More educated soldiers were capable of understanding that the efficacy of prayer was complicated. Discussing the French army, historian Raymond Jonas describes how some soldiers and officers believed that displaying a banner of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could make a difference in the success of a mission, and life over death. For others, the sing of the Sacred Heart offered a consoling promise of eternal life when death seemed near.<sup>42</sup> From the mechanistic to the hopeful to the consoling, religion offered a variety of means of coping with war. The “crisis of piety” that developed as prayers “failed” reflected the wider crisis of the prolonged stalemated war.

Robert Tiegel, the university educated law student from Nuremberg, understood the different types of effects that prayer can bring about. “Continue to pray for our victory and our lives,” he writes home. “And if the prayers should not be heard, understand that that is what is meant to be. But meanwhile continue to pray! It is good for us and for you.”<sup>43</sup> Whether or not God acts on our prayers, it is good for us to know that you are praying, and good for you to pray for us—these were the sentiments of this thoughtful student-turned-soldier, who was killed six months later when shrapnel hit his head.

The realities of warfare gave religious ritual a new context. A cantor serving as a Jewish chaplain describes Purim 1915:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> See Raymond Jonas, *The Tragic Tale of Claire Ferchaud and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 93, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Tiegel, letter dated 9 February 1916, *KGDJ*, p. 90.

The artillery fire began just at the time for reading the Megillah [i.e. the Book of Esther]. We were hit with 50 rattles. The responding activity of the howitzers and other cannons and fire projectiles made the sound of a whole army of noisemakers [*Megillaklappern*].<sup>44</sup> You can thank the artillery fire. Would that Haman would demolish all of this.<sup>45</sup>

The irony in the final sentence is extraordinary. In the traditional Jewish Purim service, the worshipping Jews make noise to drown out Haman's name, their would-be-destroyer. Here, the cantor sympathizes with Haman's wish to destroy the noisemakers, although the noisemakers have become depersonalized. They are not German or French or British; they are simply machinery. The enemy is the depersonalized industrial technology of modern mass warfare.

Messages to be taught by chaplains and learned by soldiers varied. At a Rosh Hashanah service held in Ghent, Belgium, on 9 September 1915, the chaplain, Rabbi Wilde of Magdeburg, spoke on "Why this war, why so much blood?" The service was held outdoors, attended by about 350 soldiers including physicians and a number of Jewish officers. "Just as the sun shines over the earth," preached Wilde, "so does our blessed God reign over humanity."<sup>46</sup> Over a year into the war, the rabbi had to acknowledge what was on the minds of the soldiers. As Ziemann explains, "The war went on for longer than expected and the fighting tended to intensify, while the number

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<sup>44</sup> Traditionally, one uses a noisemaker during the reading of Esther whenever Haman, the Jews' nemesis, is mentioned.

<sup>45</sup> "Feldpostbrief eines jüdischen Oberkantors," *AZdJ*, 2 July 1915, p. 318. The original letter is dated 6 March 1915.

<sup>46</sup> "Jüdischer Feldgottesdienst," *AZdJ*, 8 October 1915, p. 490.

of casualties mounted rather than diminished. Soldiers increasingly began to doubt the efficacy of divine Providence. The course of the war made the notion that God's plan of salvation underpinned it seem absurd in the eyes of ordinary soldiers. A lengthy war thus brought the problem of theodicy to the forefront."<sup>47</sup> Theodicy, the branch of theology that examines how God can allow evil and suffering, became an issue for those who had to experience the punishing trauma of battle. Rabbi Wilde's Rosh Hashanah sermon takes the classic approach of the biblical Job, that while we cannot answer the big questions, we can have faith nevertheless that God cares for us, and that there is a space for us in God's world.

Reflecting on the high holidays of 1915, Leo Baeck explains how important the sermon is for the enlisted men, whose souls are worn down by the reality of their lives in the field. "Every hour they are occupied with their duty, and with emergency," writes Baeck, "that there remains no time for peaceful spiritual contemplation. There is no room in the soul."<sup>48</sup> Only the field chaplains, argues Baeck, including Protestant and Catholic chaplains, can fill that lacuna, and restore some health to the souls of soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Army chaplain Rabbi Georg Salzberger of Frankfurt am Main understood this responsibility when he celebrated Passover at Verdun in 1916. He was well aware, with the other participants, that the battle of Verdun was the biggest battle in world history.<sup>50</sup> The will to victory through such a dismal reality of unprecedented artillery and daily rainfall marked "the highest triumph of the human spirit."<sup>51</sup> Salzberger's approach was

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<sup>47</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 134.

<sup>48</sup> *AZdJ*, 22 October 1915, p. 510.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 509.

<sup>50</sup> Georg Salzberger, "Aus Meinem Kriegstagebuch VIII: Passah vor Verdun," *Liberales Judentum* 8 (July and August 1916): 89.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

to understand the will to continue through adversity as a sign of redemption and the best hope for victory, and thereafter return home. This was how he explained the meaning of the Passover song “We were enslaved, now we are free,” a type of spiritual freedom beyond the dreariness of reality. This song was sung out by those who gathered for his Passover eve service in a church on 17 April 1916, about 500 worshippers, among them five Jewish nurses, two officers, a number of physicians and four Russian Jewish prisoners of war.<sup>52</sup> Salzberger concludes his diary reflection with a prayer that next year—following the final words of the Passover Seder liturgy—we will again be with father and mother, wife and child, with our souls happy and free.<sup>53</sup> Passover, the feast of redemption from slavery, can be redemption to those “enslaved” at Verdun.

A variation on the theme of freedom was preached by field chaplain Rabbi Lazarus of Essen, officiating at a Passover service in Macedonia in 1917, attended by about 400 German, Austrian and Hungarian soldiers, as well as Russian and Rumanian Jewish prisoners-of-war. “Be thankful that you are a servant,” Lazarus preached. “A servant fighting for outer freedom on all the fronts, and for the inner freedom known by German Jews, proudly informed by the Jewish spiritual tradition [*jüdische Geistesbildung*].”<sup>54</sup> “Outer freedom” is the freedom from foreign aggression. (The Germans, like all belligerent forces in the First World War, believed that they were engaged in a defensive struggle.) Inner freedom is the freedom of culture and *Bildung*, the essence of Germany that the army was fighting to preserve. Redemption is not yet complete. It must be struggled for, even fought for.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> *AZdJ*, 4 May 1917, p. 209. On Lazarus and Passover in Macedonia in 1918, see *AZdJ*, 10 May 1918, p. 225.

The army understood that the soldier's life was not easy, that it was incomplete. Religion alone was insufficient, "for the soldiers had not only a hungry soul," wrote a witness to Jewish high holidays services for the German tenth army in Vilna in 1917, "but also a hungry stomach."<sup>55</sup> Beyond the feeding of stomachs, the army sought to supply and regulate other physical and emotional needs of soldiers. Behind the front, brothels were "sanctioned and supervised by military authorities."<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Ziemann discusses the army's efforts to provide for and control the sexuality of its soldiers amidst his discussion of religion because both related to ethical (and emotional) control. The army understood its parental authority over soldiers, an authority which allowed for extreme contrasts given the reality of war. In this context it is understandable how the same army that provides brothels also provides chaplains. Sex and religion worked in parallel efforts in harnessing the stresses and pain that soldiers felt in wartime. The army command valued anything that helped to keep their soldiers in the trenches.

One is less surprised, then, that the tenth army's commander, General Hermann von Eichhorn, and various members of his staff, should attend the close of the Yom Kippur service led by army chaplain Rabbi Levi and attended by some twenty-five officers and 1000 men in Vilna in 1917.<sup>57</sup> A great and solemn gathering of soldiers was cause enough for the general and his staff to make an appearance. From the perspective of the soldier worshipping that day, however, the powerful image of the army commander standing with them at attention as the shofar (ram's horn) blast ended the service must have been exceptional.

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<sup>55</sup> "Die hohen Feiertage jüdischer Soldaten in Wilna," *AZdJ*, 2 November 1917, p. 521.

<sup>56</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 122. See Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, eds., *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, reprint from 1929 (Hanau: Komet, n.d.), pp. 231-254.

<sup>57</sup> *AZdJ*, 2 November 1917, p. 522.

In the last year of the war Jewish chaplains as well as thoughtful soldiers were aware of what Ziemann has called “war weariness.” “A war lasting more than four years,” he writes, “inevitably made great physical and psychological demands on soldiers.”<sup>58</sup> Leo Baeck regularly reported on the strain on soldiers due to the length of the war, and the need for chaplains to respond. “After three years of war,” he writes, “when the feet can longer lead one to further lands, one has little hope.” The chaplain, though, can lead the soldier by means of renewed hope towards the future.<sup>59</sup> A Jewish airman, F.J. Fraenkel, described the importance of the Jewish festival observances that the chaplains provided: “Every holiday for us is an oasis in the desert-wandering of the long war.”<sup>60</sup> Just as the Israelites wandered the desert endlessly in search of the promised land, so were the soldiers fighting endlessly in a seemingly endless conflict. Fraenkel was comforted by the 150 to 200 soldiers whom he joined in a small Russian synagogue for a Hanukkah service led by army chaplain Rabbi Sali Levi, in what was, unbeknownst to them, the last Hanukkah of the war.<sup>61</sup>

Festival observances brought hope and spiritual comfort to soldiers, but they also intensified their longing for home and family.<sup>62</sup> This was just as much so for Jewish soldiers during Christmas and Easter. Christian celebrations reminded Jewish soldiers of the public celebrations in their home communities, as they looked to join their new family of war comrades. German Jews had always observed Christmas to some extent,

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<sup>58</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> *AZdJ*, 14 December 1917, pp. 592-593.

<sup>60</sup> “Chanukkagottesdienst bei der 10. Armee,” *AZdJ*, 4 January 1918, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> See Ziemann, *War Experiences*, pp. 120-121.

either joining in with carols under the tree, or compensating with parallel Hanukkah observances.<sup>63</sup> Some joined in seamlessly; others with ambivalence.

The medic Alolf Wisocki compares Christmas at the front to the Hanukkah celebrations at his old orphanage in a letter to the orphanage director: “Last night we had a Christmas celebration. It was so beautiful, but not as beautiful as the Hanukkah performances that we put on in the orphanage.”<sup>64</sup> Christmas was beautiful, but it could not replace Hanukkah, or at least not the nostalgic Hanukkah of childhood. What is noteworthy is not whether Christian ritual and symbolism surpasses Judaism for Jewish soldiers, but that it had meaning at all. For many, the observance of Christmas was merely a matter of nostalgia and national culture, while for other Jewish soldiers there was usable religious content in the non-Jewish religious observance.

The extent of meaning that Christmas had for Jews on the front is reflected upon by a rabbi, Alfred Zweig, in a letter to a friend just a few days before he was killed:

On Christmas Eve I made two celebrations, the first with Rabbi Hirsch Lewkolz, which was a costly noodle soup and meat, and the other Christmas celebration was with my comrades, which was not as splendid but there was more to drink: much tea, rum and cognac. Particularly pleasant was being all together. After one of the songs I was asked to say a few words. I began by saying how I, as a Jew, felt

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<sup>63</sup> See Monika Richarz, “Der jüdische Weihnachtsbaum: Familie und Säkularisierung im deutschen Judentum des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Michael Grüttner, Rüdiger Hachtmann, Heinz Gerhard Haupt, eds., *Geschichte und Emanzipation: Festschrift für Reinhard Rürup* (Frankfurt, 1999), pp. 275-289. On wartime Christmas and some parallel comments on the role of Jewish soldiers, see Joe Perry, *Christmas in Germany 1800-1970* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).

<sup>64</sup> Adolf Wisocki (Wisotzky) to Dr. Feist, 27 December 1914, in Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon, eds., *Feldpostbriefe Jüdischer Soldaten 1914-1918* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), vol. 2, p. 646.

right in celebrating this “family festival” for two reasons. First there is the war, upon which Germany’s existence depends, that has rescinded all political and confessional differences. In the field there are no Catholics, no Protestants, no Jews, no Zentrum-people, no Social Democrats, no Poles and no Danes or Lorrainers; only Germans, as our Kaiser has stressed.<sup>65</sup>...And second...even while there are those encamped against us, we should look upon ourselves this evening only as human beings, and not distinguish between ourselves....This “Christmas celebration” is truly a “Freedom celebration.” I believe that on this day the salvation of the world will appear. For as we behold this terrible war before our eyes, we all wish from the heart for the idea of Christmas, the idea of world peace, to be quickly realized....And for that we can all pray on this festive night.<sup>66</sup>

Zweig understood the Christmas celebration to enable combatants to step outside of the conflict and pray for universal peace. The kaiser’s call for the civil truce at the start of the war is invoked to remind soldiers of the need to come together. While societal divisions proved hard to overcome, Joe Perry writes how, during the war, Christmas

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<sup>65</sup> Willelm II’s famous words on 1 August 1914 were: “In the battle now lying ahead of us, I see no more parties in my Volk. Among us there are only Germans.” See Jeremy Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 65-66.

<sup>66</sup> Alfred Zweig, letter, n.d. (but somewhere between 26 December and 31 December 1914), *KGDJ*, p. 92.

provided an opportunity “to construct a self-mobilizing myth of national solidarity centered on the holiday....The social harmony supposedly engendered by the holiday revealed the reality of the German *Burgfrieden*, the ‘fortress peace’ announced by the Kaiser at the start of the war, which supposedly united all citizens above class and confession.”<sup>67</sup> The Christmas message of peace had the potential to transcend religious differences. Christmas had a very current and universal meaning, providing a theme for preachers like Zweig that was quite different from the trend to teach hatred of the enemy.<sup>68</sup>

While not all Jews were as reflective or homiletical as Alfred Zweig on the meaning of Christmas at the front, they all experienced it. “In the evening was the Christmas celebration,” writes the Jewish medic Hermann Abraham in his diary. “It was so good and overall harmonious. We spent the night with our commander drinking beer, knowing that tomorrow the cannon fire will resume.”<sup>69</sup> The twenty-two-year-old Jewish soldier Rudolf Paul Strenger describes bonding with his Christian comrades in putting together a crèche for Christmas in Serbia in 1915. They were able to find some hay and a small broken donkey. “In such a hut Jesus must have been born!” he writes.<sup>70</sup> The soldiers were released from their drills on the afternoon of 24 December for the Christmas celebration held in a former mosque, but Strenger opted not to attend.<sup>71</sup> Strenger absented himself, and other Jewish soldiers sought out parallel Jewish

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<sup>67</sup> Perry, *Christmas in Germany*.

<sup>68</sup> On the “hatred of the opponent,” see Stéphanie Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), pp. 102-104. See also Perry, *Christmas in Germany*, on German Catholic chaplains who “turned the Prince of Peace into the Prince of War.”

<sup>69</sup> Hermann Abraham, “Kriegstagebuch” vol. 2, under section beginning 15 December 1915. Jewish Museum Berlin Archives 2003/106/7.

<sup>70</sup> Rudolf Paul Strenger, “Kriegstagebuch 1914-1918,” p. 68. Jewish Museum Berlin Archives, 2001/228/1-2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

observances like the fifty soldiers who gathered with Rabbi Jaulus in the great synagogue in Brussels for a Sunday Jewish service with German prayers and organ on what was the second day of Christmas 1915.<sup>72</sup> The interchangeability of space and time between religions in wartime is poignant here, as the Christmas worship was held in a mosque, while the Jewish service was held on the Sunday—not Saturday—of Christmas. The conditions of war interfere with the orderliness of space and time. The soldiers, and their chaplains, adjusted.

For some Jewish participants in the war, Christmas was simply a brief respite from the dreariness of war and the intensity of mortal danger. Hugo Natt, a Jewish army staff physician who earned the Iron Cross first class in 1917, describes Christmas Eve 1914 as a short break in the artillery. A piano was found in the house where he was staying, and the medical staff gathered together for drinks, smoking and singing. He notes that the Unteroffizier who was singing the solos had to write down the words for some of the holiday songs for Natt's benefit. Perhaps, as a Jew, he did not know all his carols, but he was still happy to sing along. For Natt, this was a happy though not a religious occasion. The next day, however, heavy artillery fire from the French resumed.<sup>73</sup> Christmas 1915 goes unmentioned. In 1916 he notes only "an evening of peaceful Christmas celebration."<sup>74</sup> In 1917, after the army staff dines together, "Captain

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<sup>72</sup> "Feldpostbriefe," *AZdJ*, 22 January 1915, p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Hugo Natt, "Kriegstagebuch des Stabs-und Regimentsarztes Dr. Hugo Natt: Erster Weltkrieg 1914-1918," Jewish Museum Berlin Archive, M9 R-2000/14, p. 34 of the typed manuscript (entry for 24 December 1914). For excerpts of Natt's diary (193 pages in typed manuscript), see Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Kreimeich and Irina Renz, eds., *Die Deutschen an der Somme 1914-1918: Krieg, Besatzung, Verbrannte Erde* (Essen: Klartext, 2006), pp. 154-160, 180-189.

<sup>74</sup> Natt, "Kriegstagebuch," p. 139 of the manuscript (entry for 24 December 1916).

Lüters gave me a silver liquor mug as a Christmas present.”<sup>75</sup> The captain probably gave presents to all the senior members of his staff at the Christmas dinner.

Dr. Natt was not a particularly religious person. Christmas is the only holiday that he mentions in his long diary of the war, and as noted, his account is superficial and not at all imbued with religious reflection. He mentions Jews he encountered on the eastern front, but only as one aspect in what reads at times like a tourist log.<sup>76</sup> The only times his own Jewish identity is revealed is when he records the deaths of his father and father-in-law. When his father died, his father-in-law was at his side “at the last minute and said with him the Shema.”<sup>77</sup> At his father-in-law’s funeral, “Rabbi Nobel spoke beautifully about how he remembered speaking with him [the deceased] only four weeks earlier in synagogue.”<sup>78</sup> These entries reveal that at the least, Natt’s father-in-law was an observant Jew, and Natt, while familiar with Jewish tradition, was not observant himself. Perhaps that is why the experience of Christmas was not as noteworthy for him as it was for others. For Natt, the observance of Christmas was an aspect of “secular bourgeois society” rather than a religious experience.<sup>79</sup>

The Jewish lieutenant Julius Marx writes in his diary how at the Christmas celebration in 1917, “the commander noticed, at around midnight, that our small Jewish battalion physician, Dr. Treutel, was missing, and ordered me to take some guards and find out if he was alive or dead.” Marx had already explained that “the Christmas

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 177 of the manuscript (entry for 24 December 1917).

<sup>76</sup> See Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 117, on the “opportunities for tourism” in the war.

<sup>77</sup> Natt, “Kriegstabebuch,” p. 106 of the manuscript (entry for 29 April 1916). The Shema, Deut. 6:4, a central element of Jewish liturgy, is traditionally recited on the deathbed.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 152 of the manuscript (entry for 12 May 1917).

<sup>79</sup> See Monika Richarz, “Weihnukka: Das Weihnachtsfest im jüdischen Bürgertum,” in Cilly Kugelmann, ed., *Weihnukka: Geschichten von Weihnachten und Chanukka* (Berlin: Jüdisches Museum Berlin and Nicolai Verlag, 2005), p. 98, who explains the Christmas tree in these terms. This is an abridgement of Richarz’s article cited above.

celebration was pure carnival. From the major on down all were completely drunk.” He found Dr. Treutel drunk in the infirmary, and escorted him “in pants and night shirt” to the music of the party.<sup>80</sup> According to Marx’s account, the major noticed the missing Dr. Treutel and sent after him. He referred to him as “our little Jewish battalion physician,” which can be understood as part derogatory, part affectionate, and part drunken banter. What is more telling is that he notices not only that Dr. Treutel is missing, but that he is missing and that he is Jewish. Perhaps the major was concerned that as a Jew, Dr. Treutel was not celebrating Christmas. Lieutenant Marx was quick to remedy that misperception, showing all how drunk the good doctor had gotten in his own personal Christmas eve. The major did send the one Jewish officer, Lieutenant Marx, to fetch the Jewish physician, Dr. Treutel, for the staff Christmas party. The Jews celebrated Christmas with their Christian comrades, but their Jewishness was noted both by themselves and by others. They were both insiders and outsiders at the same time, accepted into the Christian celebration, but not as full and equal participants.

The Jewish artillery lieutenant Herbert Sulzbach writes fondly of his first Christmas in the war, 1914 on the western front:

It’s snowing, a proper Christmas atmosphere...At 5 there’s a church parade; a big garage has been transformed into a church. On each side of the altar a fine Christmas tree is bright with candles, and “palms” have been put up all round the walls. The officers sat at the front, with the choir on the left, and the men standing behind. It was all so solemn and uplifting that you had tears in your eyes even

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<sup>80</sup> Marx, *Kriegstagebuch*, pp. 208-209, entry for 25 December 1917.

before you heard the strains of *Silent Night*. We were all much moved and felt quite melancholy, each of us taken up with his own thoughts of home.<sup>81</sup>

Herbert Sulzbach was not a religious man. He never mentions his Jewishness in his war diary, a text that was published in Nazi Germany in 1935 as an example of good German war patriotism “whose editors must surely have been unaware that the author came from a Jewish family.”<sup>82</sup> Only once does he hint at his Jewish upbringing, writing in September of 1916: “Now the autumn has come, and since everything somehow recalls memories of former times, these warm sunny autumn days remind one now of autumn holidays in one’s childhood.”<sup>83</sup> Those “autumn holidays” could only be Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Yet Sulzbach is removed from them. Not only are they memories of home but also of “childhood.” He remembers a childhood as a time to which one cannot return, just as his war service removes him from life at home. Even at the front he appreciates religion from a distance, because he is not Christian, and yet it appeals to him. Christmas is “the highest and most beautiful of all holidays” he writes in 1916.<sup>84</sup>

Elsewhere in his diary Sulzbach writes of the power of religion, but it is always Christian, and always from a distance. On passing through Cologne in 1917 he writes: “I’ve seen the cathedral for the first time, just as a mass was being said, and I was, as much as anyone, almost overwhelmed by the power of this splendid building.”<sup>85</sup> While

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<sup>81</sup> Herbert Sulzbach, *With the German Guns: Four Years on the Western Front 1914-1918*, trans. Richard Thonger (Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003), p. 44 (entry for 24 December 1914).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, foreward by Terence Prittie, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89 (entry for 8 September 1916).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97 (entry for 24 December 1916).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117 (entry for 28 June 1917).

the neo-Gothic architecture of the Cologne Cathedral is extraordinary, Sulzbach's impression was enhanced by the celebration of mass within the structure. He is more than a tourist but less than a worshipper. He went to the cathedral because of its cultural importance. The use of the space for a religious rite had spiritual power for him as the cathedral was a usable symbol of the depth of German culture, even if he could not connect with the rite itself. His experience of the grandeur of the Cologne cathedral is mirrored by witnessing the dismantling of church bells in the town of Vervins in occupied France: "I walked through the little town; a very great number of people were standing in front of the church, servicemen and civilians; the great bronze bells were being brought down to be melted at the foundry—these bells of peace were being made into cannon! The civilians stood watching with tears in their eyes."<sup>86</sup> Clearly, Sulzbach himself regrets the destruction of the sacred for military purposes. And yet he does not stand with the crowd; he walks past and reflects on his own. Here he is doubly distanced from the community of the faithful, both as a German soldier and as a Jew (or at least as a non-Christian).

Sulzbach's distance as a Jew is not to be discounted, as can be understood from the following passage where he describes visiting a village church with his army comrades:

One afternoon I was walking with Captain Knigge through the village of Lignières, and we went into the church. Captain Knigge sat down at the harmonium and began to play. Four old *Landwehr* men [guardsmen] were standing there with their caps in their hands, old soldiers with

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 123 (entry for 25 July 1917).

beards; and they listened, devoutly and with pleasure, as  
our Captain played.<sup>87</sup>

The old soldiers listened “devoutly” with “caps in their hands.” Sulzbach can only describe it. He was there, but not present in the same way. He appreciates the spirituality of Christianity but cannot join in. And at the same time, he can no longer access the spirituality of his own tradition.<sup>88</sup> Everything in this passage is written from a secular, modern distance, using the third person. The only sense of true connection is revealed by the switch to first person plural in “*our* captain.” To the army he belongs.

The dissociation that many Jewish soldiers felt, both from Christian and Jewish spiritualities, explains in part the attraction of Christmas observances to Jewish soldiers. The German Christmas Eve traditions of singing and drinking by the candle-lit tree were more “national” than “religious.” All German towns and villages convert their centers into “Christmas markets” in December with music, drinking and eating as townspeople celebrate together. It is a celebration that is separate from the liturgies of the church, and reaches just as much into the Teutonic past as the Roman. Jewish officers like Herbert Sulzbach, Julius Marx and Hugo Natt who would never be truly at home in a church could nevertheless partake of Christmas Eve celebrations with their comrades and feel at home. This non-Christian sense of Christmas, even when a religious service is included, can be discerned in Sulzbach’s description of Christmas 1917 on the Somme:

And now it is Christmas Eve again, the fourth in France,  
and fourth in the field; the last one, on the Somme, was

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 164 (entry for 7 April 1918).

<sup>88</sup> For discussion on the distance Jewish soldiers felt from Jewish tradition and spirituality, see the following chapter on the experience of Jewish soldiers on the eastern front.

much worse. We have a short service at the gun-sites, in a deep dug-out, with a Christmas tree bright with candles, and the gunners standing round, helmet in hand, listening with great devotion to the chaplain's words. It is impossible to describe a wartime Christmas service in a dug-out—especially the expressions of these good men, such really good people they are. After a little service like this you do, you just must, feel more than ever convinced of final victory. Then the men go to their own dug-outs, each with its own candle-lit tree, and they sit round it in deep thought for a while, but soon start to sing. The weather could not be more Chistmassy; all this snow is quite unusual for France. Whether you look at it from the guns, or from the sentry-posts, the landscape looks more and more innocent. It sparkles everywhere, you see the ruins of what used to be villages in the evening light, and far away, Laon cathedral; and you feel very moved. Late in the evening the mood turns to jollity, everyone has plenty to eat and drink, and we don't have to do much firing, so it is a harmonious Christmas Eve.<sup>89</sup>

Sulzbach's account reflects the feelings of camaraderie enhanced by the Christmas celebrations. The service moves him because the chaplain spoke apparently of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-140 (entry for Christmas Eve, 1917).

perseverance and hope, translating into a victory in the near future and end of the war. But what is missing from Sulzbach's account is any *religious* sense, Christian or otherwise, of Christmas. This dissociation from the religiousness of Christmas was not unique to non-Christian Germans, but it is noteworthy among Jewish Germans because the potential connection is inherently less accessible. The religious difference complements the spatial difference from home and hearth, making the reflections of Jewish soldiers on Christmas all the more evocative.

Christmas had its own distinctive meaning in World War I as an image of peace, or at least non-war. Sulzbach was moved by the serenity of the snowy landscape laid over the ruins of destroyed villages. Christmas was understood as a general prayer for peace, just as the snow sits upon the landscape of destruction. This sense of the Christmas of war developed from the many stories that were told of the spontaneous "Christmas truces" of 1914.

"The Christmas truce of 1914," writes Modris Eksteins, "with its tales of camaraderie and warmth between supposedly bitter enemies in the crater-scarred territory of no man's land, that bit of ground between opposing trenches whose very name appeared to forbid such intercourse, is a remarkable chapter in the history of the First World War and indeed of all war."<sup>90</sup> On numerous portions of the front, mostly the German-British front, the Germans put up their Christmas trees, both sides sang, and officers negotiated truces so that no-man's land could be cleared of bodies. Soldiers met their opponents from the other side and exchanged gifts. The truces spread down the front and were extended to a second day and in some places to New Year's until the high

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<sup>90</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Mariner, 1989), p. 97.

commands on both sides ordered their armies to resume hostilities. The stories of Christmas 1914 have been read as the spirit of universal peace begging to break through the condition of war.<sup>91</sup> “It is a strange kind of Christmas this year,” wrote the Christian philosophy student Karl Aldag from his German army trench in 1914. “So really contrary to the Gospel of Love—and yet it will be more productive of love than any other.”<sup>92</sup>

Describing Christmas 1914, the twenty-five-year-old Aldag—who would be killed on 15 January 1915—writes:

Christmas at the Front!...The English had been singing hymns, including a fine quartet. On our side too the beautiful old songs resounded, with only now and then a shot in between. The sentry-posts in the trenches were decorated with fir-branches and tinsel from home, also the dugouts....It was the clearest most beautiful night we have had for a long time.<sup>93</sup>

Aldag describes how a truce was struck on New Year’s:

New Year’s Eve was very queer here. An English officer came across with a white flag and asked for a truce from 11

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<sup>91</sup> On the Christmas truces see Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, ch. 3; Michael Jürgs, *Der kleine Frieden im Großen Krieg: Westfront 1914: Als Deutsche, Franzosen und Briten gemeinsam Weihnachten feierten* (Munich: Goldman, 2005); Stanley Weintraub, *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce* (New York: Plume, 2002); Marc Ferro, Malcolm Brown, Rémy Cazals and Olaf Mueller, *Meetings in No Man’s Land: Christmas 1914 and Fraternalization in the Great War* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2007); Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton, *Christmas Truce: The Western Front, December 1914* (London: Pan Books, 2001).

<sup>92</sup> Letter dated 18 December 1914, in Philipp Witkop, ed., *German Students’ War Letters*, trans. A.F. Wedd (Philadelphia: Pine St. Books, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, letter dated Christmas, 1914, pp. 33-34.

o'clock till 3 to bury the dead....The truce was granted. It is good not to see the corpses lying out in front of us any more. The truce was moreover extended. The English came out of their trenches into no-man's land and exchanged cigarettes, tinned meat and photographs with our men, and said they didn't want to shoot anymore. So there is an extraordinary hush, which seems quite uncanny. Our men and theirs are standing up on the parapet above the trenches.

That couldn't go on indefinitely, so we sent across to say that they must get back into their trenches as we are going to start firing. The officers answered that they were sorry, but their men wouldn't obey orders. They didn't want to go on.<sup>94</sup>

The truce as described here for New Year's was the experience of numerous parts of the front between Christmas and New Year's in 1914. The temporary cessation of hostilities and fraternization must have been an extraordinary moment for all those involved. And yet, only a Christian soldier like Aldag—and philosophy student at that--could have fully experienced that Christmas as a *Christian* moment. "I realized," Aldag wrote a week before Christmas, "the whole mystery of the Redemption and the miracle of Incarnation as I never have during a sermon."<sup>95</sup> How did Jewish soldiers understand an experience

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., letter dated 3 January 1915, pp. 34-35.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., letter dated 18 December 1914, pp. 32-33.

that their Christian comrades could see through such clearly religious lenses?<sup>96</sup> For some Christians, Christmas would have had only a national meaning. Yet for others, like Aldag, the meaning was deeper, and that would have been harder for Jews to penetrate.

For some Jewish soldiers, the music of singing across the lines carried its own meaning, irrespective of the words. Not writing about Christmas, but evocative of the experience of the 1914 truces, Herbert Sulzbach writes about a French soldier singing on the other side of the line: “What an extraordinary contrast! You fire on each other, and then all of a sudden a Frenchman starts to sing, and the music makes us forget the whole war: music seems to overcome every kind of difference.”<sup>97</sup> For Sulzbach it is music—or, a common European culture—that bridges the gap of no-man’s land between the trenches. Yet he too recognized the force of Christmas as religious spirit, even if expressed in the negative at the end of 1916: “Christmas Eve, the third I’ve spent in the field. This time the French show no regard for this, the highest and most beautiful of all holidays.”<sup>98</sup> Clearly Sulzbach remembers a different attitude from the French (and reciprocally from his side) in 1914 and 1915. “In 1916,” explains Modris Eksteins, “the incidents of fraternization dwindled to a handful....The enemy became increasingly an abstraction as the nature of war changed.”<sup>99</sup> As Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton explain, “As the numbers drawn to the Western Front grew larger and humanity seemed lost in longer and greater battles and new and ever more formidable technology, so the idea of shaking hands, joking and exchanging souvenirs with the enemy in No Man’s Land appeared increasingly remote and unreal, until even those who had taken part could

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<sup>96</sup> Christian Carion’s 2005 film *Joyeux Noël* dramatizing the Christmas truce is particularly interesting because the character of the German lieutenant is Jewish.

<sup>97</sup> Sulzbach, *With the German Guns*, p. 65 (entry for 13 August 1915).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97 (entry for 24 December 1916).

<sup>99</sup> Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 135.

find it difficult to accept that such events had actually occurred.”<sup>100</sup> Noteworthy in Sulzbach’s comment in late 1916 is not only a sense of this change in the nature of war, but also of the spiritual potential of Christmas as “the highest and most beautiful of all holidays.” For a Jewish officer estranged from his own Jewish traditions and yet separated from Christianity because of his Jewishness, Sulzbach can still appreciate the aesthetic beauty of Christmas.

The young Jewish poet Walter Heymann (1882-1915) describes in his letters how the soldiers would rest by the Christmas tree, sing Christmas songs and find peace.<sup>101</sup> To this thoughtful Jewish poet and soldier, Christmas was “so beautiful” (*so schön*).<sup>102</sup> But again, his account of Christmas is about the respite it provided from the horror of warfare and the universal hope for peace on earth. It is not in any way based in the Christian religious context of Christmas. In an earlier letter he describes singing Christian hymns in the church where they are sleeping, remarking in a voice of critique that “the funeral hymn ‘Jesus is my surety’ is more a shining joke than a dark joy.”<sup>103</sup> He is no more reverent in mixing the sacred tones of Jewish liturgy with the realities of war, for in the very next passage of this same letter he compares the call of the drill sergeant to the Shema (“Hear O Israel”), the central text of Jewish prayer: “The drill is a banal Shema, filling one with purpose, each one to his specific part in the formation of a totality of order and discipline.”<sup>104</sup> Both Christian and Jewish liturgies are critiqued by Heymann

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<sup>100</sup> Brown and Seaton, *Christmas Truce*, p. 207.

<sup>101</sup> Walther Heymann, *Kriegsgedichte und Feldpostbriefe* (Munich, 1915), pp. 106, 109, 112 (letters from 10 December and 18 December 1914).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64 (letter from 12 October 1914).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

for their use in the military conflagration. How, then, does he see Christmas as “so beautiful”?

Like Sulzbach, Heymann may have been too separated from Judaism to find a meaningful spirituality in Jewish ritual, and too Jewish to find a meaningful spirituality in Christian ritual. And yet, he did appreciate the religious symbolism of Christianity beyond the mere jolly-making of Christmas Eve. In the midst of the wounded and the dying, he writes: “One understands the martyr better now, his joy, in suffering for Christ.”<sup>105</sup> But Heymann goes on to argue that suffering for its own sake is insufficient, and he faults the Church in failing to emphasize that the feeling of pain that motivates one to help others is more significant than the suffering itself.<sup>106</sup> While his understanding of Church doctrine may be limited by his experiences as a young Jewish intellectual, his sense of the presence of Christianity in the trenches is telling. For many of his religious Christian comrades, solace could be found in suffering as the service of salvation (*das Märtyrertum für andere als erlösendes Verdienst*).<sup>107</sup> Heymann is sensitive enough to understand the role that Christianity was playing, what historian Annette Becker has called “the mystique of sacrifice,”<sup>108</sup> even if his Jewishness kept him outside that circle of meaning.

The cross functioned as a symbol of sacrifice and suffering. Sometimes the cross symbolized resurrection; at other times the salvation of death that awaited so many. “A wonderful moonlit night, and at the town’s exit,” writes Jewish lieutenant Julius Marx of Cagnicourt, “under the crucifix sitting still is a shadow, a woman, clothed in black, a dark

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 101 (letter from 27 November 1914).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-102.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>108</sup> Annette Becker, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930*, trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p. 22.

cloth around her face. She does not rise for the many men passing through.”<sup>109</sup> Marx’s dark lady is the angel of death, hovering over the soldiers passing below. His vision is strikingly similar to that of the Christian student of philosophy Helmut Zschuppe, who wrote about the Cologne cathedral being used as a military hospital: “The Holy Ghost is captive in the Cathedral. In the form of a dove He must hang, with outstretched wings above the nave. Far below stray a few human beings.”<sup>110</sup> Perhaps Marx’s image is feminine to avoid the direct association with the masculine Christian imagery of Christ, but in both there is a figure of supernatural origin suspended above the soldiers, either by the cross of the town gate, or in the heights of the cathedral with “outstretched wings” forming the shape of a cross. The outstretched hands of Jesus on the cross are a welcome to those entering the Kingdom. At the same time, it gave forth the promise of meaning, and, ultimately, resurrection.

“The idea of the Imitation of Christ,” write historians Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, “did somehow apply to all the belligerents, Christian or not. It was quite logical that for societies where most of the people were Christian, Christianity’s message of sacrifice and resurrection should fit so perfectly with this effort.”<sup>111</sup> The usability of the Christian symbols was due not only that it came from the majority religion, but because it provided a readily accessible theology of suffering that brought meaning to the senseless of the war experience. “The First World War,” explains Sabine Behrenbeck, was “often interpreted as a profane communion and revelation....Death on the battlefield was bestowed with the aura of a sacred act. The sacrificial death of the nation’s best was a reenactment of Christ’s Passion, as suffering was supposed to lead to

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<sup>109</sup> Julius Marx, *Kriegstagebuch eines Juden*, p. 213 (entry for 23 March 1918).

<sup>110</sup> Letter dated 13 November 1916, in Witkop, ed., *German Students’ War Letters*, p. 367.

<sup>111</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, p. 123.

resurrection.”<sup>112</sup> Christianity offered a theology where suffering had meaning, where the struggles on the battlefield could lead to an individual spiritual—as well as national—salvation.

Suffering in Judaism never had the same existential salvific meaning as it had in Christianity. “Modern liberal Judaism,” writes Leora Batnitzky, “came to see Jewish suffering, and specifically anti-Semitism, in connection with the inability of the nations of the world to accept Judaism’s contribution to universal culture. Jewish suffering, then, only reinforced the Jewish mission to the nations, for this suffering showed the distance the nations of the world were from the pure monotheism that Judaism taught.” While acknowledging that “after the Holocaust...many Jewish thinkers have increasingly moved away from ascribing any sort of value to suffering,” nevertheless, Batnitzky explains that in the modern period before the Holocaust, a variety of strands of Judaism “suggest that although vicarious suffering has an ethical and theological value, suffering is not a value in and of itself. It would be better to do without suffering.”<sup>113</sup> For modern Jewish theologians who informed the Judaism that Jewish soldiers would have received, suffering was not a religious end in itself. Jewish suffering was national, rather than personal. Rather than identify and relive the Passion of Jesus, the Jewish people’s suffering through the ages was a Passion on behalf of the Truth of ethical monotheism and its vision of a universal peaceful future. In Leo Baeck’s words as articulated in his *Essence of Judaism* published shortly after the war in 1922, “Not only does man endure

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<sup>112</sup> Sabine Behrenbeck, “The Transformation of Sacrifice: German Identity Between Heroic Narrative and Economic Success,” in Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian, eds., *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 116.

<sup>113</sup> Leora Batnitzky, “On the Suffering of God’s Chosen: Christian Views in Jewish Terms,” in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Samuel and Michael S. Signer, eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 214, 215.

suffering—if that is all, it is mere misery—but he takes it upon himself and overcomes it....Jews realized that suffering for Judaism meant suffering for the ideal....The misery of the present and the wealth of the expected future were reconciled as Jews realized that in the picture of the servant of the Lord they might truly see and know themselves.”<sup>114</sup> Suffering did have meaning for Jews as it did for Christians, but whereas for Christians it meant identifying with the suffering of Jesus and thereby realizing the grace of personal redemption by situating oneself within salvation history, for Jews it meant identifying with the Jewish people *as* Christ—that is, the messianic redeemer of the world—and working to bring forth the real redemption of the world through human history.

One value of the contemporary views of suffering that Jewish soldiers would have heard from preachers like Leo Baeck was that it helped them gain comfort in accessing and taking part in the wider use of the image of suffering. If suffering had *national* meaning in Jewish theology then it could also have national meaning within the wider German national context. Jewish soldiers were able to join their Christian comrades, then, in relating to the symbols of Christianity, since they were read by, and had become, symbols of the national culture. Writing about the ethic of sacrifice, historian George L. Mosse argues how “a Christian theme became symbolic of sacrifice for the nation.”<sup>115</sup> The symbolic power of Christian symbols took on meaning for non-Christian Germans when the Christian symbols took on German national meaning.<sup>116</sup> Focusing on the young university-educated officers and noncoms, a group that included the Jewish officer corps, Mosse explains how “death in war was a sacrifice for the nation....National faith and

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<sup>114</sup> Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 138, 249.

<sup>115</sup> George L. Mosse, “The Jews and the German War Experience 1914-1918,” p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> In contrast, see Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 102, who disputes Mosse’s thesis that Jewish soldiers related to Christian symbolism. Perhaps she is correct for the Austrian context.

Christian faith were identical in the Myth of the War Experience put forward by the German volunteers.”<sup>117</sup> Identifying this “Myth of the War Experience” as a sacralization of sacrifice using Christian imagery, Mosse suggests that for Jews there was sometimes “a confusion of Christian symbolism and Jewish identity.”<sup>118</sup> However, such confusion is rarely emphasized by Jewish soldiers. While the Christian symbolism employed in understanding the war may have alienated some Jews, it is far more likely that in its war context it provided an entryway for Jews into the wider German culture, much like the Christmas of the trenches. Indeed, the Jews of Germany had already been acculturated to Christmas as a national holiday. The war experience intensified that connection.

Jewish soldiers joined their Christian comrades in turning to religion to help them through the experience of the war. When turning to Christian symbols, Jewish soldiers were not simply engaging in a national ideology separated from its religious roots. Christian symbols still functioned as religious symbols, even if seen through non-Christian eyes. Jewish soldiers, in this way, joined their Christian comrades in what First World War historian Jay Winter calls a universal “search for the sacred.”<sup>119</sup> And yet, those same symbols appear with slight variations when imbued with Jewish meaning.

The 1921 volume of poems and etchings by the Jewish artist Uriel Birnbaum, *In Gottes Krieg [In God’s War]* serves as a poignant illustration of the utilization of Christian religious imagery in a Jewish imagination. Birnbaum’s evocative work is dark, in that the religious symbols are mixed with those of death. Skeletons and skulls haunt

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<sup>117</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 32, 35.

<sup>118</sup> Mosse, “the Jews and the German War Experience,” p. 11. Mosse is writing there specifically about the sermons of Jewish chaplains.

<sup>119</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 77.

the living. As such, they signify, at the same time, the specter of death and the hope of resurrection. The ambiguous tension between faith and protest shines through the starkness of his etchings and words. In the opening title poem, “In Gottes Krieg” [In God’s War], a soldier prays on his knees to live, exclaiming: “The Glory of God over God’s deep.” The etching at the bottom shows the petitioner as a skeleton praying among scattered skulls (Appendix, Figure 8).<sup>120</sup> The image of the return of the dead was explored in postwar literature and film.<sup>121</sup> Here, Birnbaum exploits the image of prayer and the hope of salvation as pointless if the petitioner is already dead. God’s glory may reign over the deep, but the deep is so very deep.

While Birnbaum’s dark imagery may be a protest against a less critical religiosity found in the trenches, it also, at face value, represents an attempt to apply religious tradition to the modern tragedy of war on a scale previously unknown. He pictures a skeleton, perhaps the angel of death, standing upon the world playing a bugle, as a call to arms (Appendix, Figure 9).<sup>122</sup> The skeleton figure standing over the earth was a common image, as parallels can be found in the rich collection of images collected by Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gasper in their 1929 *Sittengeschichte der Ersten Weltkrieges* [*Moral History of the First World War*]. There we find a drawing of a skeleton stabbing Europe with a sword (Appendix, Figure 10),<sup>123</sup> or of a giant skeleton walking across a town collecting heads for his spear (Appendix, Figure 11).<sup>124</sup> The skeleton playing the bugle is paralleled in a lithograph of death personified as a skeleton playing the bugle on

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<sup>120</sup> Uriel Birnbaum, “In Gottes Krieg,” *In Gottes Krieg: Sonette* (Vienna and Berlin, 1921), p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> See Winter’s discussion of the scene of the army of the dead in the French film *J’accuse*, in Winter, *Sites of Memory*, pp. 15ff.

<sup>122</sup> Birnbaum, “Kriegsausbruch,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> Vittorio Petrella, “Der Krieg und Europa,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte der Ersten Weltkrieges*, p. 17.

<sup>124</sup> Georg Kretzschmar, “Das Gespenst des Krieges,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 11.

a battlefield scattered with corpses and human bones (Appendix, Figure 12).<sup>125</sup> Beyond questions of the effectiveness of mass-casualty warfare, the visual imagery of death personified standing “above” the carnage raises questions of ultimate meaning and the role of God, even if that meaning is pictured in its negative valence as Death.

In his visualization of the end of the war, Birnbaum draws for us a single remaining emaciated body amidst a pile of skulls. An angel descends toward the individual, but the vision is a question on the nature of salvation: how can the individual truly be saved, if he has suffered so much? (Appendix, Figure 13).<sup>126</sup> In another image of loneliness, “The Battle,” Birnbaum pictures a single soldier sitting watch with his rifle looking up as a troop of haunting skulls fly at him from the sky (Appendix, Figure 14).<sup>127</sup> The existential experience of war was not unique. A parallel to Birnbaum’s images can be found in a woodcut by Frans Masereel of a girl crying, carrying a bouquet of dead flowers, as she passes through an army of skeletons (Appendix, Figure 15).<sup>128</sup> What is noteworthy here is the parallel. Birnbaum’s struggle of critique of war from the perspective of religion is not unique to a Jewish or Christian perspective. The experience of religion in war—symbolized here by the angels and by the skulls denoting human mortality in contradistinction to the world of spirits—and its limitations, were universal among soldiers of various religious backgrounds.

Another example of a parallel of religious imagery is the personification of hatred and prejudice, as exacerbated in war, as the devil. In a drawing of “Pogrom: Lemberg 1918,” Birnbaum shows a scared bearded Eastern European Jew backing away

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<sup>125</sup> Honoré Daumier, “Der Tod bläst die Friedensschalmei,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 592.

<sup>126</sup> Birnbaum, “Ende,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 267.

<sup>127</sup> Birnbaum, “Die Schlacht,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 151.

<sup>128</sup> Frans Masereel, “Das ist kein Traum,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 602.

from the bat-like claws of a devil-figure five-times his size (Appendix, Figure 16).<sup>129</sup> While pogroms against Eastern European Jews did take place as the war ended and the order that was the Austro-Hungarian empire disintegrated into competing nationalisms, the events can be connected to the hatred bred by war. Birnbaum, at least, connected the two in his volume. A parallel image is a 1915 drawing by Gordon M. Forsyth entitled, “The Triumph of Hatred,” where Hatred is personified as a horned-devil squatting upon a artillery cannon. Bound to the wheels are three women labeled individually as “Civilization,” “Art,” and “Religion (Appendix, Figure 17).”<sup>130</sup> In both cases, the barbaric hatred and prejudice bred by war is associated as the obverse of salvation.

As opposed to the dark images of Death and the devil, Birnbaum also has images of brightness and salvation. A reclining, bandaged soldier is being cared for by a nurse, who, standing over him, enfolds him in her arms, with her white gowns draping over, as if they were an angel’s wings. Concentric halos shine around her as darkness gives way to light (Appendix, Figure 18).<sup>131</sup> In another picture, the nurse is herself ailing and an angel wraps its wings around her as her nurse, again with concentric halos surrounding (Appendix, Figure 19).<sup>132</sup> While saintly halos are a characteristic of Christian art and iconography, there is nothing specifically Christian about this image. And yet it is surely a religious image.

The image of the nurse was not always a saintly motif in the culture of the war. Hirschfeld and Gaspar devote an entire chapter to the “Eroticism of Nursing.”<sup>133</sup> Much of Hirschfeld and Gaspar’s volume is a study in the control and non-control of sexuality

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<sup>129</sup> Birnbaum, “Pogrom: Lemberg 1918,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 253.

<sup>130</sup> Gordon M. Forsyth, “Der Triumph des Hasses,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 553.

<sup>131</sup> Birnbaum, “An Eine Schwester,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 205.

<sup>132</sup> Birnbaum, “Kranke Schwester,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 233.

<sup>133</sup> Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, pp. 121-138.

in the war. The relationship of control of sexuality to religion is noted by Benjamin Ziemann, who explains how “the control of sexuality was one of the ‘central axes of Christian socialisation’ within popular Catholicism. At the front...the threshold for offences against the normative religious code sank during the war.”<sup>134</sup> A graffiti drawing from a Viennese reservist hospital preserved by Hirschfeld and Gaspar, which they title “Angel or Prostitute?” shows a nurse, with headdress and Red Cross armband, kneeling over a bench in prayer wearing nothing else but a garter belt (Appendix, Figure 20).<sup>135</sup> Her position is at the same time both religious and erotic, which is the tension that makes for the striking image. Religion becomes pornographic in the uncontrolled social context of war. The eroticization of religious imagery should be understood as parallel to the use of skulls, skeletons and devils in the imagery discussed above. The imagery is meant to arouse our critical faculties: what good is religion in the uncivilized and unbridled senselessness of war? Religion radicalized is here religion questioned.

In a drawing entitled “The Last Temptation,” Birnbaum depicts a dark soldier trying to escape from the image of a beautiful nude woman with black hair down to her legs floating above him, and five-times his size (Appendix, Figure 21).<sup>136</sup> The gargantuan alluring image parallels the looming devil threatening the persecuted Jew in his “Pogrom: Lemberg 1918” image referred to above, or as a large skull and hand seizing a soldier in “The Wounding” (Appendix, Figure 22).<sup>137</sup> Birnbaum’s soldiers are often small powerless figures in the face of disproportionately large images, whether they

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<sup>134</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 123, citing Josef Mooser, “Katholische Volksreligion, Klerus und Bürgertum in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Wolfgang Schieder, ed., *Religion und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), p. 156.

<sup>135</sup> “Engel oder Dirne?” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 138.

<sup>136</sup> Birnbaum, “Letzte Versuchung,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 37.

<sup>137</sup> Birnbaum, “Die Verwundung,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 167.

be threatening skeletons of death, devils, or angels, or tempting women. The woman in “The Last Temptation” is Temptation personified, but in the accompanying poem, Temptation is presented as duty, as death, and as God. “That in the war I was sent by God, to know God’s hand eternally.”<sup>138</sup> The title “Last Temptation” is a reference, of course, to the last temptation of Jesus, and yet there is nothing Christian in Birnbaum’s poem and drawing besides that allusion. The conflation of the religious language, the sense of sacrifice, and the pictured nude reflects the role of sexual imagery as a radicalization of religious expression in wartime. Are our actions in war truly a mission “to know God’s hand,” Birnbaum is asking, or have we been deceived by Temptation, pretending to divine sanction? The sexual imagery suggests both the intimacy of relationship with God and the vulgarization of that relationship.

The strikingness of scale and images is paralleled in a drawing found in a French trench picturing a voluptuous nude woman reclining upon a lion’s head lying on a trench with scattered skulls surrounding (Appendix, Figure 23).<sup>139</sup> The woman, whose sexual organs are emphasized, is twice the size of the lion, which is itself five to ten times the size it should be in relation to the trench. Sexuality (the woman) and honor (the lion), representing perhaps the essence of humanity, are both defeated, looming over a field of corpses. Birnbaum’s image in “The Last Temptation” is different, though, in that the soldier is struggling, even if fruitlessly, against the allure of the hovering nude. And whereas in the French trench graffiti the nude is in a sexually submissive position, in “The Last Temptation” her legs are together in a modest if seductive stance. In Birnbaum’s vision, religion, and humanity, have not yet capitulated to Temptation and its

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<sup>138</sup> Birnbaum, *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 42.

<sup>139</sup> “Der Traum der Soldaten,” in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 155.

destruction of culture, as in the French graffiti image. Birnbaum opens a discussion with us on the role of God in war, and a hope of salvation is left as an open question.

In “Yom Kippur 1916” Birnbaum pictures a soldier standing and praying from a book enveloped again, here protectively, by a disproportionately large angel, wings surrounding the soldier (Appendix, Figure 24).<sup>140</sup> Here we have a perfect example of a Judaization of Christian imagery. The nurturing angel is a typical Christian image, but here the angel is masculine, and enfolds in light and protection a praying Jewish soldier.

The masculine angel enveloping the praying Jew as envisioned by Uriel Birnbaum could represent the Germany of the “the myth of the war experience” according to George Mosse. But that Germany personified is more than a national symbol. The religiousness of it is Christian in nature but relevant enough to bring meaning and solace to Jewish soldiers. The comfort Jews were able to take from Christian religious imagery and make “Jewish” tells us as much about religion for Jews at the front as their engagement with Jewish ritual and non-involvement with Christian ritual. While recognizing that the majority culture was Christian, Jews were able to interface with that tradition enough to find common or acceptable symbolism, and that acceptance also made them comfortable in engaging their own religious tradition, as exemplified in Birnbaum’s drawing of “Yom Kippur 1916.”

Chapter Three will examine how contact with Eastern European Jewry on the Eastern front intensified Jewish soldiers’ identification with Judaism.

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<sup>140</sup> Birnbaum, “Yom Kippur 1916,” *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 107.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### ENCOUNTERING EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY

The experience of Jewish soldiers in the German army on the eastern front intensified their Jewish identity within the army. Jewish soldiers, along with their Christian comrades, confronted the Jews of Eastern Europe, the *Ostjuden*. Unlike the entrenched experience of the western front, in the east the armies experienced far more mobility over many more thousands of miles. The German forces in the east also experienced something that was elusive for most combatants during the long four years of conflict—victory. The army established occupational control over enormous areas of conquered territory. The Jewish population was encountered, though, not merely as a colonized people but also as a reflection of the Jews of Germany. The familiarity, discomfort and allure of the *Ostjuden* brought both pressures and comforts to the German Jewish soldiers.

The experience of the Ostfront for German soldiers was profoundly different from the war in the west. Firstly, it was supposed to be *the* war, after a quick victory over France, if the Schlieffen Plan that Germany implemented at the start of hostilities had worked.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the Germans fought the two-front war they wished to avoid until the war against Russia was resolved in Germany's favor by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Secondly, it is not the war that we think about when we imagine the First World War. "In Europe's collective memory," writes Christoph Mick, "the Western Front dominates

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<sup>1</sup> See John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), ch. 2.

the remembrance of the First World War.”<sup>2</sup> Although perhaps more lethal, and certainly larger in area, the eastern front is forgotten in favor of the western.<sup>3</sup> “For most of us,” writes Samuel Hynes, “the soldiers’ tale of the First World War is the story of four years of fighting along a narrow band of earth that stretched across northern France from the Channel to the Swiss border....We create our own war-in-our-heads, in which the Western Front is the entire war.”<sup>4</sup> The story of the war on the eastern front is so little known that historian Jay Winter writes that “the ten million men in uniform who fought the First World War on the Eastern Front constituted the largest group of unknown soldiers in the twentieth century.” Historians have neglected the eastern front, Russian historians because they were more concerned with the Russian Revolution, and Western historians because they were more concerned with the conflict of the western powers—Britain, France and the US—than with Germany. Therefore, Winter notes, “there is a massive imbalance between the voluminous historical literature and visual evidence available on the war in the west and the relative paucity of material concerning the war in the east.”<sup>5</sup>

While the eastern front is not the focus of the way the First World War is remembered, it was central to the initial German perception of the war. German concern over the danger of Russian expansionism and pan-Slavism had been a critical factor in Germany’s decision to back Austria in its dispute with Serbia that brought about the war

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<sup>2</sup> Christoph Mick, “Der vergessene Krieg—Die schwierige Erinnerung an den Ersten Weltkrieg in Osteuropa,” in Rainer Rother, ed., *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Ereignis und Erinnerung* (Berlin and Wolfratshausen: Deutsches Historisches Museum and Edition Minerva, 2004), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> On the Eastern front being “more lethal than the war in the west” when disease is factored in, see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness of Modern War* (New York: Allen Lane, 1997), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 80-81.

in the first place. Historian Troy Paddock has argued that “the portrayal of Russia as a backward, barbaric, Asiatic nation that had not been a part of the occidental tradition,” before the war reflected a broad consensus in German newspapers across the political spectrum as well as in the writings of historians and even elementary geographical textbooks. It was not mere wartime propaganda, he argues, that “the aims of the Russian Empire” at the start of the war “were characterized as overtly anti-Western and as a threat to all the achievements of human civilization. Germany, on the other hand, was depicted as the perfect union of government and governed, organic, healthy, moral, spiritual and civilized. Confident of its abilities and of its providential destiny, Germany was the defender of humanity against the Slavic horde.”<sup>6</sup> Germany represented the forces of *Kultur* against the uncultured barbaric East.

For Jews throughout the world, the eastern front remained the focus of attention. “From the beginning,” writes Marsha Ronzenblit, “Jews viewed the war solely as a war to defeat Russia, a task necessary in part to check Russian despotism but mostly to liberate Russian Jews.”<sup>7</sup> Since the pogroms of the 1880s, the precarious condition of the Jews within the Russian Empire was the priority concern for world Jewry. The struggle against the Tsar, that is, the campaign on the Ostfront, held especial meaning for German Jews. The difficult struggle against the French and British on the western front was a more complex conflict to understand, as it was for all German soldiers. On the western front the Jews related to the French in the same way that most German soldiers did—as enemies not so different from themselves. There is no sense of the French as “other” and

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<sup>6</sup> Troy R.E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, The Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890-1914* (Boulder, Colorado: Camden House, 2010), p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44.

no focus on French antisemitism. On the western front, the focus was on German duty and honor rather than on the enemy. In contrast, on the eastern front, there was also an evil enemy as well as an oppressed people in the process of being liberated from that evil enemy's control. "Jews could endorse the war with an easy conscience," writes Steven E. Ascheim, "because the enemy was Russian absolutism; at last the despotic anti-Semitic heritage would be brought to account."<sup>8</sup>

The Jews of Germany were acutely aware of the opportunity of liberation for the Ostjuden that the war promised with victory in the east. The war also brought tales of further Russian oppression. "When Russian armies fled east after the defeats of 1914 and 1915," Winter writes, "Jewish villages were torched and looted, and their inhabitants raped and killed. It is no irony to say that the advancing German army units were seen as liberators of some Jewish communities, reduced by fire and slaughter to a miserable state."<sup>9</sup> That the Germans did not necessarily bring paradise to the inhabitants of Eastern Europe was to be expected. "Occupation is never a clean operation," Winter concedes.<sup>10</sup> What made the experience of German Jewish soldiers in the east unique in comparison to other examples of conquest and colonization was that the German Jewish soldiers, while representing the forces of culture and civilization entering a less civilized (read: less industrialized) region were at the same time encountering what many accepted as a more authentic form of their own Jewish culture. For German Jews, Russia was not simply the "Oriental Other" as Troy Paddock argues. As the home of millions of Jews and the seats

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<sup>8</sup> Steven E. Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 97-99. See also, on the positive effects of German occupation on the Eastern European Jewish population, Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 122ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

of traditional Jewish learning, the lands of Jewish settlement within the Russian Empire were the source of deep ambivalence for German Jews. Their claim to authenticity was tied their “backwardness”: Jewry in the Russian Empire was not exposed to the modernizing influences of Enlightenment and Emancipation that had transformed German Jewry. Their authenticity was rooted in their lack of modern culture. There the pristine Judaism could be discovered before the scalpel of modernity made its mark. Rather than “barbaric,” Eastern Europe in the German Jewish perspective might be characterized as “aboriginal.”

The bond that connected German Jewish soldiers with their brethren in the East was mirrored by their brethren across enemy lines. Antisemitism was generally more intense in the East, and the Russian Jewish soldier did not meet with the same opportunities for integration as did German Jewish soldiers. Russian Jewish soldiers faced persecution and prejudice and were often suspected of spying for the Germans.<sup>11</sup> “The Russian- or Polish-Jewish soldier,” writes David G. Roskies, “who hoped to achieve a degree of acceptance denied him in civilian life discovered, more often than not, that he shared a deeper bond with his Galician- and German-Jewish enemy than with his comrades-in-arms.”<sup>12</sup> This bond was confirmed by the work that the German Jewish community did in caring for Russian Jewish prisoners of war, even burying Russian

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<sup>11</sup> See Ariel Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe During the Great War,” in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Sities, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 95; Mark Levene, “Frontiers of Genocide: Jews in the Eastern War Zones, 1914-1920 and 1941,” in Panikos Panayi, ed., *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 93-96.

<sup>12</sup> David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 136.

Jewish soldiers alongside (but not within) the “Field of Honor” cemetery for German Jewish soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

For German Jews, the demonization of tsarist Russia came easily since it was informed both by their Jewish and German identities. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius has explained that the German occupiers saw Eastern Europe as a land of *Unkultur*, placing the project of administration of conquered eastern territory—referred to as Ober Ost—within a cultural context.<sup>14</sup> Troy Paddock expands that perspective in backdating the estimation of Russia as uncultured—even as non-European—to a generation of Wilhelminian roots across the political spectrum rather than a product of occupation in the East.<sup>15</sup> The political story of the German military occupation of vast areas of Eastern Europe and Eastern European Jewry during the war is a story that has been told.<sup>16</sup> Of interest here is the story of the encounter of German Jewish soldiers with Eastern European Jews and Judaism.

Poignant though the encounter with the East was for those who experienced it, most did not. The German war effort was focused on the West, where three quarters of its manpower had always been focused. “The vast majority of the troops of the German Army were fated to serve on the Western front,” writes Ian Passingham, something that

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<sup>13</sup> See Daniela Gauding, “Das Sammelgrab für russische jüdische Kriegsgefangene des Ersten Weltkrieges und die Fürsorge für jüdische Kriegsgefangene in Deutschland,” in Sabine Hank and Hermann Simons, eds., *Bis der Krieg uns lehrt, was der Friede bedeutet”: Das Ehrenfeld für die jüdischen Gefallenen des Weltkrieges auf dem Friedhof der Berliner Jüdischen Gemeinde* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> For Paddock’s “correction” of Liulevicius, see Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, pp. 5, 223.

<sup>16</sup> See Liulevicius, *War Land*, and the still authoritative Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), pp. 101-284. See also Jürgen Matthäus, “German *Judenpolitik* in Lithuania During the First World War” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 43 (1998): 155-174.

cannot be said of the eastern front.<sup>17</sup> According to the sixty-five service records of fallen Jewish officers in the Bavarian army that were examined at the Bavarian military archives in Munich, only eleven served on the eastern front (that is, 17 percent). And of those eleven officers, each of them also served on the western front. While the experience of Jewish soldiers on the eastern front must therefore be qualified, it is still a story that merits discussion. The reactions of German Jewish soldiers to the Jews and Judaism of the East reveals as much about their own Jewish identity as of that encountered in occupied territory. As Troy Paddock writes, describing German views of Russia in general, “The dissection and analysis of an image or stereotype illuminates the creator of a stereotype more than the person or thing that is characterized.”<sup>18</sup> The encounter with the Other is a self-revealing experience.

While much has been written about the westward movement of Eastern European Jews into Germany, here, in Jay Winter’s terms, “the movement is in the other direction. When educated and sophisticated German and Austrian Jews arrived in the small shtetls of eastern Europe, they were turning the clock back two hundred years.” Writing about the photographic record of Bernhard Bardach, a Jewish officer in the Austrian army, preserved by the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, Winter reflects on “the range of reactions this encounter elicited. Curiosity, puzzlement, distaste, affection, even solidarity.”<sup>19</sup> Letters and memoirs from the eastern front add texture to the encounter. They reflect both positive and negative encounters. For many, the encounter was one of

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<sup>17</sup> Ian Passingham, *All the Kaiser’s Men: The Life and Death of the German Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p. xvi.

<sup>18</sup> Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 89. On the reception of Eastern European Jews in Germany, the two standard treatments are Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, and Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

discomfort, for others it was one of detached amusement while still others found the comfort of recognition and acceptance.

### **Discomforting Encounters**

German Jews experienced the *Unkultur* of the Russian Empire along with other Germans. Willy Simson, an instructor in a Jewish orphanage in Berlin, writes to the orphanage director: “In Russian-Poland one does not dress up at night and wash. One wanders through languages and customs and does not recognize oneself.”<sup>20</sup> The East was a mixture of a multitude of languages and cultures, including, in the northern German occupational district Ober Ost, no less than Lithuanians, Latvians, Belarusians, Poles, Russians, Baltic Germans, Estonians and Jews.<sup>21</sup> Another Jewish soldier writes home complaining that “the population is filled with Poles and Jews. I must make out both Polish and Hebrew script...Hopefully we will not remain here long.”<sup>22</sup> The mixture of languages was understood as emblematic of an unordered society. “This entire scene was unsettling for Germans,” writes Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius. “Fundamental rules they knew from home did not seem to apply, for ethnicity here seemed at once crucial and yet unstable, in flux.”<sup>23</sup> The mixture of cultures and languages translated as cultural confusion for the conquering Germans. Additionally, the perception of the less-ordered

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<sup>20</sup> Willy Simson to Feist, 24 January 1915, in Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon, eds., *Feldpostbriefe Jüdischer Soldaten 1914-1918* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), vol. 2, p. 602.

<sup>21</sup> See Liulevicius, *War Land*, pp. 30-33.

<sup>22</sup> Letter dated 2 September 1914, in Eugen Tannenbaum, ed., *Kriegsbriefe Deutscher und Österreichischer Juden* (Berlin: Neue Verlag, 1915), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, pp. 33-34.

culture as hygienically unclean was widespread, although not only as clearly connected as in the letter from Willy Simson.<sup>24</sup>

“The conditions of war made it easy to fuse myth with reality,” writes Steven E. Ascheim. “Ostjuden had always been stereotyped as dirty, and what the soldiers found as they entered the ghettos of Poland, Galicia and Lithuania vindicated that idea. They very often did find unsanitary conditions, a situation that the German occupation did excellent work in improving.” The project of disinfection of the east surely had a cultural as well as hygienic aspect. “Many Germans regarding the cleansing as an explicit act of political hygiene, an effort at massive cultural purification.”<sup>25</sup> Liulevicius notes that the mandatory bathing and vaccinations that the German authorities imposed on the occupied population were remembered “as one of the few positive legacies of German occupation, for that the measures were resisted at the time.” Cultural and national feelings aside, the Germans did work to improve the public health of the region. The symbolism could not have been lost on German soldiers though, that by bringing health where there was once disease they were bringing *Kultur* to where there was once *Unkultur*. “It is a cruel irony,” concedes Liulevicius, “that in a later era, perverted echoes of this useful work in the East were heard in another kind of ‘processing,’ when ‘showers’ provided the cover for mass murder in the Nazi death camps.”<sup>26</sup> And yet, one can imagine that the use of the showers in the death camps helped not only with the murderous project at hand, but also with the cultural project of forming the mindset of the concentration camp guards as that of cultural purifiers who were quarantining and destroying a societal plague. The

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<sup>24</sup> For the classic account of how control of hygiene and public health establish the credentials of civilization in a German context, see Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years 1830-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 148.

<sup>26</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 106.

comparison to the Holocaust-context is relevant only in understanding the nexus between public health administration and the sense of cultural superiority.

Whatever the actual instances of unhygienic circumstances and disease, the overall determination of the East as “dirty” is belied by the comment of Hugo Natt, the Jewish army staff physician, noting during his travels with the army through the Polish countryside: “The country folk appear quite clean, not so unlike our own country population.”<sup>27</sup> That Natt’s observation of the Polish country folk would not apply to the Jews of the East is difficult to imagine, since in his first mention of encountering Jews, a month later, he is impressed that they understand German, and that their children have learned some German in school. There is nothing to imply that he is put off by unhygienic circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

More than health and cleanliness, Jewish soldiers were struck by the moral condition of the Eastern Jews, specifically with the widespread phenomenon of prostitution, much of which was Jewish. Hugo Natt writes about a Polish village filled with German and Austrian troops, with the local families sitting together, the daughter dressed seductively showing off her hair and figure, her father with caftan and ear locks sitting below.<sup>29</sup> Natt observes matter-of-factly, and one can detect more the amusement of the tourist or of the detached officer than moral condemnation in his tone. While historian Michael Berkowitz may be correct that “the middle class sensibilities of many of the soldiers were offended, even if Jewish prostitutes were a known element of Central

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<sup>27</sup> Hugo Natt, *Kriegstagebuch*, entry for 8 May 1915 (p. 52 of the manuscript). Jewish Museum Berlin Archive M9 R-2004/14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 16 June 1915 (p. 65 of the manuscript).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for 3 June 1915 (p. 61 of the manuscript).

European urban life,” others would not have been phased.<sup>30</sup> Berkowitz describes Jewish prostitution in the East within the context of contact between German Jewish soldiers and Eastern Jewish women. Prostitution was one form of that contact, along with “predictable romantic liaisons” and an “intellectual engagement” that was “beyond that to which they were accustomed at home with the Jewish women of their cohort.”<sup>31</sup> Berkowitz describes the Jewish women of the East as educated and sophisticated, even if compelled to prostitute themselves to the occupying forces. The East was attractive to the Jewish soldiers for the cultured people whom they could meet through uncultured—that is, free from the rigid controls of bourgeois society—contexts.

That prostitution was a perceived problem among Eastern European Jewish society is well documented.<sup>32</sup> That Jewish prostitution was less extraordinary than contemporary accounts imagined is explained by historian Keely Stauter-Halsted. “Although contemporary sources often characterized Jewish women as comprising a disproportionate number of prostitutes in Galicia, local police records for Cracow and L’viv do not confirm this impression,” but rather reveal that the numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish prostitutes were “approximately the same proportion of Jews to Christians” in the urban population.<sup>33</sup> Stauter-Halsted argues that “while there is certainly ample evidence that Jews were well represented in the sex trade in the Polish lands—as they were in most urban professions and international trading networks—it is equally clear that by turning the problem of paid sex and trafficking in human goods into a primarily

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> See Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1880-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983); Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1938* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Keely Stauter-Halsted, “‘A Generation of Monsters’: Jews, Prostitution, and Racial Purity in the 1892 L’viv White Slavery Trial,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 28, n. 16.

Jewish issue, the Polish public effectively dodged a whole host of causal factors responsible for maintaining a thriving prostitution industry in Poland and beyond.”<sup>34</sup> The attention was focused on *Jewish* prostitution in order to mask the wider extent of prostitution in Eastern Europe. Accepting this important qualification, the encounter of German Jewish soldiers with *Jewish* prostitution in the East is what would have added to the ambiguity of their encounter with Eastern Jewry—Jewish prostitution was not apparent back home in Germany. Additionally, Steven Ascheim argues that Jewish prostitution in the East was exacerbated by the war: “The poverty, uprooting and demoralization created by the war made this activity—which had its prewar roots—less inhibited and more blatant. It was, moreover, facilitated by the linguistic fact that Yiddish and German were close enough to afford the veneer of communicability, not the case with Polish and German.”<sup>35</sup> Prostitution, a perennial aspect of conquered territory, had a specifically Jewish face in German occupied Poland and Russia. “There can be little doubt,” Ascheim concludes, “that the image of the Ostjuden as mediated by the war experience was tied in with the theme of prostitution.”<sup>36</sup>

A drawing by L. Gedö is most telling, showing three young boys surrounding an officer and pointing him off in one direction. The caption reads: “Herr Offizier, kommen Sie zu meiner Schwester—nur ein chalbe Brott!” (Herr Officer, come to my sister, only a half loaf of bread!) The word for “half” is spelled with a “ch” rather than an “h” indicating the Yiddish inflection of the German. Additionally, behind the individuals in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> Steven E. Ascheim, “Eastern Jews, German Jews and Germany’s Ostpolitik in the First World War,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 28 (1983): 353.

<sup>36</sup> Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 147.

the scene is a store sign reading “Avram Goldfunk,” making the Jewish context inescapable (Appendix, Figure 25).<sup>37</sup>

Some Jewish soldiers responded to encountering Eastern Jewish prostitution with disgust and condemnation. The Zionist Robert Weltsch wrote of Jewish prostitutes in the east that “what the war has made of them I consider to be the greatest national misfortune that has confronted us.” Weltsch wrote about the lack of shame, and the need to build up a sense of Jewish pride.<sup>38</sup> The Zionist Adolf Friedemann quoted the German police chief in Lodz that sixty percent of the prostitutes in his district were Jewish, and that “Jews were heavily represented in crime and their sexual mores indescribable.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that Friedmann is referring to an urban district that may have been populated by a concentration of lower class Jews does not diminish the shame reflected in Friedmann’s perception. However, the photographic record of Bernhard Bardach tells a somewhat different story. One of his photographs shows a German officer approaching three Jewish prostitutes on a village street in occupied Eastern territory (Appendix, Figure 26). Knowing that they are being photographed, two of the women cover their faces with their hands while the other one turns to the side. Their response to the photographer clearly demonstrates a sense of shame and degradation, as opposed to shamelessness that would have triggered the disgust and condemnation in an observer like Friedmann. Jay Winter’s contextualization of the photograph as showing the women being approached by a medical officer does not alleviate the sense of shame on the part of the women: “There

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<sup>37</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Hanau: Komet, 1929), p. 270. The drawing is reproduced in Ascheim, *Brothers and Sisters*, p. 147, but the caption is translated into English there and loses the Yiddish tone of “chalbe.”

<sup>38</sup> Cited and summarized in Ascheim, *Brothers and Sisters*, pp. 169-170. See also Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Adolf Friedemann diary, p. 17, Central Zionist Archives A8/2/4, cited in Ascheim, “Eastern Jews, German Jews and Germany’s Ostpolitik,” pp. 353-354.

are photographs of hospital work alongside some images of prostitutes, who were screened by the army medical corps to limit the spread of venereal disease and prevent it from crippling the whole of the German army.”<sup>40</sup> But the women are still hiding their faces.

While Zionists like Weltsch and Friedemann responded to Eastern prostitution with shame and a call for renewal, the German military authorities were concerned with the spread of disease. “The very idea of epidemics spreading back to Germany transfixed Hindenburg and Ludendorff with disgusted horror,” writes Liulevicius. “Venereal disease in the pestilent towns loomed up for them as a special nightmare: an official source claimed that at first 70 percent of Wilna’s prostitutes were infected.”<sup>41</sup> The army’s regulation of prostitution can be understood as an aspect of the sanitary defense line against the spread of disease, and as recognition of the reality that soldiers in occupied territory will “mix” with the local population. “It appears that the army ran its own military brothels” writes Liulevicius. “Posters in Kowno gave directions on condom use, disinfection after intercourse, obligatory registration of prostitutes’ permits, and measures in the event of infection.”<sup>42</sup> Liulevicius explains the hygienic measures as not only protective measures for the German army but also as part of the project of spreading German *Kultur* in an unordered disease-ridden language-confused uncultured land. At the same time, he acknowledges that soldiers’ engagement with the local population, both socially and sexually, took on an aspect of estrangement from home. “Isolated,” he explains, “some soldiers began to turn to the natives. Orders against fraternization lapsed in the face of everyday reality. A hybrid life evolved for troops, prostitution its hallmark,

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<sup>40</sup>Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>41</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

causing outbreaks of venereal disease.”<sup>43</sup> The campaign to spread *Kultur* weakened, as the soldiers came to accept the presence of the Other, even if it entailed disease.

The most telling Jewish responses to Eastern Jewish prostitution are those of Hugo Natt, through his diary, and Herbert Bardach, through his photographs. Both accept the reality, without much comment. The Other is Other. The Jewishness of the Ostjuden is accepted only intellectually. The distance between is too great, as exemplified by the lack of shock or outrage.

Amidst the general sense of the fear of disease, the decrees of the German occupation authorities on bathing are particularly interesting. “Bath-houses were established,” writes Jürgen Matthäus, “using wherever available and after agreement with the rabbi, existing Jewish ritual baths.”<sup>44</sup> While it is unlikely that the German authorities understood the meaning of the Jewish ritual bath—the *mikveh*—in Jewish culture, the significance of its use in these hygienic measures is potently ironic. The mikveh is the ritual bath that the Jewish woman visits after her menstrual cycle before she can resume relations with her husband. The observance of these laws is generally referred to as “Family Purity” (*taharat hamishpahah* in Hebrew) in Jewish tradition since the wife is set aside from her husband for a certain amount of time each month. The Jewish man does not control the Jewish woman’s body, and marital relations are regulated. This regulation—and with an hygienic element—that is inherent in ancient Jewish tradition goes unmentioned in the accounts of the “indescribable sexual mores” of the Eastern Jews, and yet, the ritual baths are ubiquitous in Eastern Europe so that the German authorities could negotiate with the rabbis to make use of them for the local population.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>44</sup> Matthäus, “German *Judenpolitik* in Lithuania,” p. 163.

Writing home about bathing in a mikveh, a Jewish soldier relates:

Yesterday I took my first bath in several weeks. I could only find for a bath the mikveh. It was an impeccable bathing, and I was wonderfully refreshed.<sup>45</sup>

The account of the soldier refreshing himself in a mikveh is powerful because in Jewish tradition, the mikveh washes away impurities. But the soldier here relates no religious understanding or connection with the site, least of all that he is washing away the impurities of war. His presence is purely that of a tourist. That is not to say that all German Jewish soldiers were disconnected with their religious heritage. But it is anecdotally significant since it shows us that upon encountering a Jewish site, his response is not as a Jew but rather as a soldier in search of a bath. He is first a German soldier. His account of refreshment in the mikveh carries a sense of amusement, that he found peace—and cleanliness—within the bosom of the Ostjuden, of all places.

### **Neutral Encounters**

Whether it was through prostitution or bathing, Jewish soldiers on the eastern front could not but encounter their Jewish brethren. Many German Jewish soldiers, like Hugo Natt, recount their encounter with Ostjuden as matter-of-fact. Describing his train transport through Poland, Hermann Abraham, a Jewish German army medic, recounts:

We entertained a visitor who was, of course, Jewish. He was telling me how his wife was operated on by a Professor Israel in Berlin. He spoke half Polish, half German and

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<sup>45</sup>Letter dated 3 December 1914, in Tannenbaum, ed., *Kriegsbriefe*, p. 123.

half Yiddish. We stopped also by a baker by whose window hung a sign in Hebrew but I could not read it.<sup>46</sup>

Through the matter-of-fact presentation we can discover a familiar-yet-detached experience of Eastern European Judaism. The visiting Jew was able to strike up a conversation with Abraham since they were both Jewish. The Ostjude knew enough German that Abraham was able to understand him. Their conversation was focused on the medical establishment and Jewish doctors in Berlin. The Ostjude had no doubt asked Abraham if he knew Professor Israel, a Berlin Jewish surgeon who had operated on his wife. Abraham entertained this individual not only because he was Jewish, but also because he was no doubt of the more well-to-do class since he was able to send his wife to Berlin for surgery. Abraham notes, though, the mixture of tongues. The individual he met could not speak a pure German. Underlying that is the sense of cultural superiority. The second element of his account is about passing the bakery with the sign in Hebrew. The sign would have been in Yiddish, which is written in Hebrew letters. The fact that Abraham could not read the sign, and could not even recognize it as Yiddish rather than Hebrew—he would have known what Hebrew letters look like but did not know Hebrew or Yiddish well enough to differentiate between the two languages—testifies to the distance that he found between himself and the Eastern European Jews. That he mentions it indicates that he nevertheless felt enough of a connection. The fact that he saw a sign in Hebrew was significant to him, whereas a Polish sign would not have been worth mentioning at all.

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<sup>46</sup> Hermann Abraham, *II. Kriegstagebuch von Hermann Abraham Sanitätssoldat in Königl. Preuss. Hilfs-Lazaretten No. 12 der 12. Armee Etappen...im Osten* [handwritten war diary, vol. 2], entry for 24 November 1915. Jewish Museum Berlin Archive 2003/106/7.

Yiddish played an important role in bridging the gap between the German soldiers—Jewish and non-Jewish—and the local (occupied) Jewish population. Steven Ascheim’s explanation of Yiddish as serving a facilitating role in the extent of Eastern Jewish prostitution vis-à-vis the German army has already been noted. “Yiddish and German were enough alike, “he explains, “to make communication possible, which was not true of German and Polish.”<sup>47</sup> Yiddish also served to open the doors for German officers to Jewish theater. As Ariel Roshwald writes: “German military officers, who could comprehend snatches of Yiddish dialogue, were drawn in increasing numbers to the Vilna Troupe’s productions, joining everyone else in rising in honor of the Zionist anthem ‘Ha-Tikvah’ (The Hope) when it was played at the end of performances.”<sup>48</sup> The German officers were thrilled to find a form of entertainment to which they had at least some linguistic access. “Yiddish was accessible to the German ear,” as Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius explains.<sup>49</sup> But Yiddish was not a language spoken by the German Jews, who a century earlier had put Yiddish aside in favor of German. “Before World War I,” writes Zosa Szajkowski, “Yiddish was regarded by most Western Jews as a disgrace.”<sup>50</sup> For German Jewish soldiers on the Eastern Front, Yiddish was a bridge to their Eastern European brethren, but also a sign of distance.

German Jewish soldiers encountered a sense of Jewish nationality in the East that they had not known or experienced in Germany. Germany had no secular Jewish theater

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<sup>47</sup> Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> Ariel Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity,” p. 121. See also Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>49</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> Zosa Szajkowski, “The Struggle for Yiddish During World War I: The Attitude of German Jewry,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 9 (1964): 131.

tradition like the Yiddish stage of Vilna. A Jewish lieutenant expresses this realization in his diary upon serving in Galicia:

Suddenly I can truly understand the antisemitism in Galicia. Here in Galicia the Jew stands separate from the other races. By us it is not like this. There [in Germany] the Jew does not feel at all like a nationality. We are *German Jews*.”<sup>51</sup>

Encountering Ostjuden helped Jewish soldiers define their own identity as German Jews. “Moving east and meeting *Ostjuden*,” writes Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, “[German Jews] were suddenly even more sensitive to their own difference as ‘Germans of the Mosaic confession.’”<sup>52</sup> For some Jewish soldiers, like Franz Rosenzweig who will be discussed below, this elicited existential questioning and crisis. For others, like Lustig, the experience only clarified the distance.

Lieutenant Julius Marx, like Lustig, experienced the Jews of the East as Other to himself, but with the ambivalent ties of common heritage. He writes in his diary about his time in the Polish town of Tykocin: “Market square: Jews, Jews, long beards, ear locks, caftans, crumpled hats.” His observation cannot but establish the distance that exists between him, the German officer, and these “natives.” But then he continues his description, explaining how the Russians had plundered as they left. The Cossacks had always oppressed them, and that now “they welcomed the Germans as liberators.” Marx

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<sup>51</sup> Leutnant Lustig, *Kriegstagebuch*, entry for 29 March 1918, p. 14 of the manuscript. Leo Baeck Institute New York Memoir Collection, microfilm MM2 MM2. (The catalogue lists this diary as “Anonymous” but the attribution to Lt. Lustig appears at the end of the manuscript, if it is the same document. Lustig seems to have served in the Austrian army. However, he refers throughout to “Germany” so he may have been a German Jew serving with the Austrian forces.)

<sup>52</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 41.

goes to the synagogue. “A grey-bearded man led the liturgy for the new moon. I identified myself as a co-religionist. ‘Ä Jid, ä Jid’ passed from mouth to mouth in joy.”<sup>53</sup> Marx relates two series of welcomes that he experiences in Tykocin. First, as a German officer, welcomed as a liberator. Then, when he reveals his identity as a Jew in the synagogue, he is welcomed as a fellow Jew, referred to joyously as a “Jid,” that is, “Jew” in Yiddish. Marx’s use of the Yiddish is important here. He does not speak Yiddish with them. They use the Yiddish amongst themselves, but about him. He is related to in Yiddish, but while he joins them in the liturgy—which would have been in Hebrew—he does not join them in Yiddish conversation. He was a knowledgeable Jew himself in that he knew that the liturgy was that of the New Moon. He remains distant from the Yiddish even though that is how they warm up to him when he joins them in their midst.

Marx continues to describe the synagogue service, the elderly men, the woman with eight children, and how the rabbi spoke and the congregation cried over lost members of the community. Marx thinks of his father, “my old pious father, always in mind,” until his reverie is interrupted by someone yelling, “A Jewish officer!” The individual approaches Marx with question after question, addressed in an unsteady German. “Will they return, the Russians?” he asks. “No, they will not return,” Marx responds. “Blessed be God, they will come no more, they will come no more, blessed be God!” responds Marx’s interlocutor. After the service, Marx is greeted by all those in attendance. The men shake his hand. The women introduce themselves. A young

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<sup>53</sup> Julius Marx, *Kriegstagebuch Eines Juden* (Frankfurt: Ner Tamid Verlag, 1964), p. 76. Entry for 22 August 1915.

woman kisses him. The rabbi gives him a blessing. Marx imagines if his father were there and could have witnessed the scene.<sup>54</sup>

Lieutenant Marx was clearly moved by his experience in the synagogue in Tykocin. He is connected to the Jews of Tykocin through religion. His experience in synagogue makes him think of his own pious father. From that remark we learn that Marx did not usually attend synagogue. Why then did he do so here? Perhaps curiosity, having encountered a village with so many Jews. He is moved by how he is greeted, by his celebrity status as a Jewish officer in the German army. And yet he cannot join them in their Yiddish conversation, and they struggle to interact with him in German. The connection is warm and moving, but still distant. The synagogue reminds him of his father and of his religious roots in Germany, but he does not confess any great affection for the Jews he has discovered.

The nature of Marx's encounter with Ostjuden is further revealed by the next entry in his diary, five days later when he enters Bialystok:

Bialystok. Jews, from the poorest musicians to the great merchants. I stop by a cigarette supplier and ask for her help in a number of requisitions.

She looks in wonder at my two decorations and asks [in broken German:] 'Have you killed a Cossack, that you have so many decorations?'

'No, my dear, not one, but a dozen.'

'*Wos, ain Dutzend Kosaken—wos ain Held!*' (What, a dozen Cossacks—what a hero!)

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 76-77.

The translation does not capture the last line, where Marx records the Yiddish reaction and pronunciation of the Jewish woman merchant. Marx goes on to insist that this did happen. He then relates how she and some other beautiful women treated him to a multi-course meal in a kosher restaurant. His reaction reveals both his appreciation but distance from the Jewish women he encountered: “I got up full from this menu, and continued on. Evening—promenade....[then] marching on.”<sup>55</sup> Marx is flattered by the attention and the way he is treated. His reaction is that of a young man treated with food and compliments—and perhaps sexual attention—by an attractive woman. His role as bringing liberation from the Russian Cossack to his Jewish brethren, or the fact that this woman was Jewish at all, is not central to his experience.

Two months later Lieutenant Marx arrives in Vilna, where he and his fellow officers are greeted by a great mass of Jewish population.<sup>56</sup> A few days later Marx is strolling through the Jewish Quarter of Vilna and comes upon a scene where a German soldier is trying to leave without paying for his drink. Marx pays for the soldier, not wanting to cause a scene. The proprietor, “a red-haired Jew,” is able to speak good German and converses with Marx. “Are you glad that the Russian regime is over?” Marx asks in conversation. “Why,” responds the Jewish proprietor. “I did well under the Russians. Good business. Good money...What will happen when Poland becomes German? Why hope that it should be better? One always hopes that things be better than they are!” “We drank a little Shnapps together,” Marx continues, “and then I stood up and told him that I was a Jew! A quick look of surprise in his eyes. And then he bowed

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-79. Entry for 27 August 1915.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 93. Entry for 8 October 1915.

his head.”<sup>57</sup> Marx’s account here of this conversation over a drink is extraordinary because neither he the German officer, nor the Vilna barkeeper, are in synch with the great developments of Jewish history around them. The red-haired barkeeper is concerned with his own business. He did well under the Russians. He does not know how things will be under German hegemony. The fact that the Jews faced oppression under the Russians, as was so immediate a concern to the Jewish villagers Marx had met earlier in his travels, is irrelevant. And Marx himself would never be thought of as a Jew until he identifies himself. He was the German officer, rescuing one of his men from not having money to pay his tab. Just as the red-haired barkeeper’s Jewishness was irrelevant to his politics, so was Marx’s irrelevant to his role as a German officer. Marx’s encounter with the Ostjuden, whether the welcome in the synagogue or the doting village woman or the entrepreneurial city barkeeper, are of the “neutral” type. He is not made uncomfortable by the encounter, but neither does it have existential meaning for him in defining his identity.

### **Comforting Encounters**

Not all Jewish soldiers were as detached from their experiences with the Ostjuden as Julius Marx. A Jewish soldier who was hosted by a Polish Jewish family for a Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year’s) meal in 1914 writes home about how impressed he is with “our Polish co-religionists” (*unsere polnischen Glaubenbrüder*). The soldier writes about how he finds unjust the German Jewish prejudice against the Ostjuden:

All Jews are brothers....More Jews should revise their  
judgment against the character of the Polish Jews. The

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 94. Entry for 11 October 1915.

*Schnorer* [Yiddish for beggar] that comes to Germany is a prototype of the Polish Jew that is severely untrue.<sup>58</sup>

And according to another soldier named Wertheim:

By us in the West the Polish Jews have a bad reputation...But it is something else when one gets to know them in their own milieu....What a joy it is to discover one's brethren!<sup>59</sup>

The repudiation of the German Jewish prejudice against the Ostjuden is best expressed in the letter of Franz Rosenzweig, the famed Jewish philosopher, to his parents from the Balkans in 1916:

There is no such thing as the problem of East European Jews; there's only the Jewish problem—and strictly speaking even that doesn't exist. Bear in mind that the whole German fear of the East European Jew does not refer to him as such, but to him as a potential Western Jew; i.e., one like you.<sup>60</sup>

Rosenzweig represented “a generation of Jews,” according to Shulamit Volkov, “who were relatively free from the anxiety of social climbing, [a generation that] was beginning to look inward....Recognizing the foreigners as a reflection of oneself.”<sup>61</sup>

Rosenzweig's existential discovery of his own Jewish identity during the war involved a

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<sup>58</sup> Letter dated 26 September 1914, Tannenbaum, ed., *Kriegsbriefe*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>59</sup> Wertheim's letter, dated 4 November 1914, in Tannenbaum, *Kriegsbriefe*, p. 112.

<sup>60</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to his parents, 7 June 1916, in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> Shulamit Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation: *Ostjuden* and German Jews,” in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, eds., *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), p. 211.

necessary dissociation from the stereotypes and prejudices of his background.<sup>62</sup> The Ostjude, the once derided “poor cousins” from Poland, were here admired for their Jewish authenticity. In Steven Ascheim’s terms, for Rosenzweig, “the enthusiasm for the Ostjude served as a means and measure for a radical critique of German Jewish life.”<sup>63</sup>

Writing from just outside Warsaw in 1918, Rosenzweig writes to his mother:

The Jewish boys are magnificent, and I felt something I rarely feel, pride in my race, in so much freshness and vivacity. Driving through the town, too, I was impressed by the masses of Jews. Their costume is really very attractive, and so is their language....I can well understand why the average German Jew no longer feels any kinship with these East European Jews: actually he has very little such kinship left; he has become philistine, bourgeois; but I, and people like me should feel the kinship strongly.<sup>64</sup>

Rosenzweig’s discovery of his own identity on the eastern front corresponded to a critique and dissociation from where he came from. Though distinct from the officers cavorting with Eastern prostitutes, Rosenzweig too had “gone native.”

Franz Rosenzweig found the Eastern Jews to be more authentic than the Judaism he knew in Germany. Explaining to his mother why he has not responded to the letters of an old Jewish acquaintance, Rosenzweig writes:

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<sup>62</sup> On Rosenzweig’s experience in the Eastern front as the context for the development of his existentialist theology and his master work, the *Stern der Erlösung*, see Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg: Kriegserfahrungen, weltanschauliche Debatten und kulturelle Neuentwürfe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), pp. 298-304.

<sup>63</sup> Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 190.

<sup>64</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to his Mother, 23 May 1918, in Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 74. See also Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 205.

But it isn't because of Poland and other countries of his ancestors that I don't write to him; the Poland that fails to connect us would be between us also in Heidelberg. The real Poland, as I judge from your letter, lies more between myself and my *Jewish* relatives....Our craven chiming in with the chorus of obloquy against the Polish Jews is the most shameful of the many shameful things that make up Jewish life in Germany.<sup>65</sup>

Rosenzweig's rejection of his upbringing in his embrace of the Ostjuden represents a minority generational movement in Germany that Steven Ascheim has called "the cult of the Ostjuden."<sup>66</sup> Rosenzweig represents those young German Jews who, in Ariel Roshwald's words, "looked to East European Jewish culture as a vibrant, spontaneous expression of folk spirit that contrasted sharply with what they regarded as the stiff formality and artificiality of German Jewish culture—be it of the assimilated or Orthodox variety."<sup>67</sup> Rosenzweig's role is important, not only because of his voice, which becomes more influential with time, but also because his experience was formed by the wartime encounter. He was the assimilated German Jew and soldier who joined a Sabbath celebration in Warsaw and was moved by the authenticity of what he saw. "Nor have I ever heard such praying," he writes.<sup>68</sup> The war placed him in a context where, even if it existed in Germany, he might never have found it. "German Jewish soldiers," explains Jürgen Matthäus, "often encountered key elements of Jewishness in their Eastern brethren

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<sup>65</sup> Rosenzweig to his Mother, 10 June 1918, in Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> See Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, ch. 8.

<sup>67</sup> Ashwald, "Jewish Cultural Identity," p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Rosenzweig to his Mother, 28 May 1918, in Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 75.

which had long been lost in Western Europe.”<sup>69</sup> Rosenzweig was one of those soldiers who, as Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius describes, “confronted what they agreed was their own unassimilated past and this encounter produced reactions in many, sometimes creating personal crises and changing lives.”<sup>70</sup>

Most soldiers did not have the mind for existential meditation that Franz Rosenzweig did. And most soldiers did not elevate the Judaism of the Ostjuden to a higher plane than the Judaism that they knew back in Germany because most German Jews were secularized and knew the Judaism of Germany only peripherally. The encounter with the Ostjuden, and the masses of Jewish population in the East, did, however, arouse the interest of the Jewish soldiers in their own Jewishness. Rabbi Leo Baeck, who served as a German army chaplain in the East, reports how whenever a company would arrive in a town “the first question” asked by the Jewish soldiers “was whether there are Jewish families living there. They wish to be housed with them.”<sup>71</sup> Another chaplain, Dr. Bruno Weil, in reporting on Rosh HaShanah (Jewish New Year) in Vilna in 1917, explains how for the Jewish soldiers “the war has deepened their interest in all things Jewish” and for that reason they “have come together with the Jewish masses of the East” for the high holiday worship services coordinated by the army chaplaincy.<sup>72</sup> According to Baeck and Weil, the interest in Judaism on the part of the soldiers is due not only to the call of religion while in the field of war, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also to the encounter with the Jewishness of the East.

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<sup>69</sup> Matthäus, “German *Judenpolitik* in Lithuania,” p. 162.

<sup>70</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 17 March 1916, p. 123.

<sup>72</sup> *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 2 November 1917, p. 522.

Sometimes the private celebrations held in villagers' homes exceeded the public worship services in their meaningfulness for the Jewish soldiers. "Common celebrations of the Jewish Sabbath and festivals," writes Steven Ascheim, "and fervent singing and dancing of Hasidic melodies produced moments of ecstatic identification."<sup>73</sup> Such was the experience of a Sabbath afternoon meal described by Franz Rosenzweig:

The singing was the main thing; I have never heard anything like it. These people don't need an organ, with their surging enthusiasm, the voices of children and old men blended.<sup>74</sup>

The soldier Wertheim also wrote about singing in a Polish Jewish family's home. He describes how his host family had a two-year-old son who came forward with a little melody and the text of "Deutschland Deutschland über Alles." Wertheim controlled his laughter, and then sang his best with the boy. Wertheim describes the evening as "*Heimabend in Feindesland* [a homecoming in enemy territory] not to be forgotten."<sup>75</sup> For Wertheim, his "homecoming in enemy territory" consisted of a Polish Jewish family hosting an occupying German Jewish soldier and their two-year-old child singing the German national anthem with him. What is striking is that the highlight of the bonding between German and Polish Jew was not any particular Jewish ritual or song, but the singing of "Deutschland Deutschland über Alles." This experience contrasts against Rosenzweig's account of Sabbath songs, and further contrasts against the recorded accounts noted above of non-Jewish German officers singing the Hatikvah, what was to become Israel's national anthem, while attending the Yiddish theater in occupied Vilna.

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<sup>73</sup> Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 189.

<sup>74</sup> Rosenzweig to his Mother, 28 May 1918, in Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 75.

<sup>75</sup> Wertheim's Letter dated 4 November 1914, Tannenbaum, *Kriegsbriefe*, p. 113.

These different songs and contexts exemplify the complex nature of the encounter of Eastern European Jewry by the German army.

### **Interpreting the Encounter**

The encounter of German Jewish soldiers with the Jewish East cannot be explained through the usual categories of colonialism. The German government certainly tried to exploit world Jewish opinion about Russian persecution of the Jews, seeking “to convince world opinion,” in Aviel Roshwald’s words, “that the German drive eastwards represented the advance of civilization in the face of barbarism.”<sup>76</sup> Encountering a multi-ethnic multi-lingual territory, “the ethnic groups in the population had, in the German mind,” as Matthäus explains, “one thing in common: their relative inferiority, which manifested itself in low cultural, social and hygienic standards, as well as in total political immaturity....The alleged backwardness of the locals served not only as a constant excuse for keeping them out of political affairs; it also gave German rule over the area the appearance of a colonizing mission.”<sup>77</sup> While the idea of colonialism is usually applied to Europeans out of Europe, it is not completely inapt in describing the German role in Eastern Europe. Most historiography, according to Pascal Grosse, “has been reluctant to describe the German historical experience in eastern Europe since the eighteenth century as ‘colonialism,’” although, as Grosse notes, this is beginning to change.<sup>78</sup> Germany would indeed have perceived for itself a “colonial mission” in Eastern Europe.<sup>79</sup> As Troy

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<sup>76</sup> Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity,” p. 102.

<sup>77</sup> Matthäus, “German *Judenpolitik* in Lithuania,” pp. 159-160.

<sup>78</sup> Pascal Grosse, “What Does German Colonialism Have to Do with National Socialism? A Conceptual Framework,” in Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, Lora Widenthal and Sander Gilman, eds., *Germany’s Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 119. See also Kristin Kopp, “Constructing Racial Difference in Colonial Poland,” in *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, pp. 76-96.

<sup>79</sup> On the German cultural mission in the East, see in general Liulevicius, *War Land*.

Paddock explains, Germans already thought of Russia as the “Oriental Other.”<sup>80</sup> But for Jewish soldiers, the engagement in the East was far more complex.

For the German Jewish soldier in Eastern Europe, the Ostjude was not a mere primitive native, nor even a co-religionist, but an ancestor. Eastern European Judaism represented to the German Jews a Judaism not yet transformed by modernity. Some, like Franz Rosenzweig, romanticized them. Other resisted that romanticization by establishing distance. Telling is the account of Dr. Jacob Sanger, another Jewish chaplain in the German army serving in Galicia. Sanger retells his interaction with the Jewish population in “a characteristic medieval Jewish quarter” in a Galician town. He is introduced as the “*Feldsrabbiner*” (Field-rabbi), or as the “*daitshen Doktorrabbiner*” (German Doctor-rabbi). Implicit in Sanger’s remark is the distance inherent in the way he is referred to by the “locals,” that is, as the German Doctor-Rabbi. He is referred to in Yiddish, identified as German, and qualified as a Doctor-Rabbi. In the Galician shtetl the rabbis did not earn doctorates. While in the German Jewish context a “Rabbiner Doktor” was the aspired rank for a religious leader, in Galicia the “Doktor” made Sanger somewhat less than a full rabbi. This is made evident by the continuation of Sanger’s account, where he is asked if he has even once studied the Talmud and the Shulhan Arukh, core texts of rabbinic Judaism. Sanger is able to assure them that he has, and only then does he become accepted as an equal. In his continuing account, Sanger reports on the state of education. Not only is the education of a purely religious nature, but the children are educated in dark rooms for long hours with little food. Most tellingly, Sanger is troubled that “the Jewish girls here learn nothing.” He examined a number of girls and found that while they could say the “Shema Yisrael” (the basic creed of Jewish

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<sup>80</sup> See Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, p. 10.

liturgy) they could not explain its meaning. Sanger concludes with the necessity for Jewish educational reform in Galicia, with the need “to cultivate the Jews with some Germanness (*Deutschtum*).”<sup>81</sup>

The reflexiveness of Sanger’s account is poignant. The local Jews are skeptical of his rabbinic education, while he finds fault with their educational program. While he focuses on the poor education of the girls, the point cannot be missed that he is looking for a minimal level of education from them, whereas they expected a very high learned education of a rabbi, that is, in Talmud and Shulhan Arukh (although not in Western learning). He comes with a “civilizing mission” of educational reform, but the level of Jewish education, at least for the better educated men in Galicia, would have exceeded that of the average German Jew. While Sanger’s account illuminates this complex nature of the encounter, he himself retains the distance that the local Jewish population at first asserts, that he is the “German Doctor-Rabbi.”

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius explains the unique experience of Germans on the eastern front as “a struggle for community and identity in vast expanses.”<sup>82</sup> For the Jewish soldiers, their relationship to the local Jewish population forced them to confront their own identity as Germans and Jews. However that process was navigated, the connection could not be ignored. The ties that bound German and Russian Jew cannot be illustrated better than in the following war story told by a German Jewish soldier about the Battle of Tannenberg, a key German victory over Russian forces in the East:

It was the Battle of Tannenberg. Our infantry had  
successfully charged the defending Russians. Passing

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<sup>81</sup> Jacob Sanger, “Im galizischen Judenviertel,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 6 August 1915, p. 379.

<sup>82</sup> Liulevicius, *War Land*, p. 135.

through the field I suddenly heard the moans of a badly wounded Russian. I got off of my horse and he said to me in great pain: “Comrade, what happened, that you did this to me?” I explained that I was artillery, and besides, war is war. In response to his pleas, I gave him the last few drops of the cold coffee from my canteen. In thanks he gave me his prayerbook, the Siddur [Hebrew for prayerbook], with the words: “May this bring you luck, Comrade, for it can no longer do so for me.” I had to respond to the order to return to my battery, but then returned to the dying Russian. He recognized me and wished to say something. His voice was faint. I again got off of my horse and leaned over him. With his last efforts he gave me from his pocket a sheet of greaseproof paper. I closed his eyelids and read to him the words on the paper: *Schmah Jisroel, Adannoj elauheinu, Adannoj echod* [“Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God the Lord is one” in Hebrew with German Jewish pronunciation]. This Siddur and this sheet of paper I have kept with me ever since.<sup>83</sup>

That Tannenberg, a key victory with echoes to the Teutonic past, should be the scene for such an exchange is dramatic enough. What makes this letter even more telling is that, at the very moment of German victory, the defeated Russian soldier enlightens the German victor as to their common camaraderie as Jews. The Russian gives a religious artifact to

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<sup>83</sup> *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 22 January 1915, p. 44. My translation here takes some liberties.

the German, who in turn performs the Jewish liturgy of last rites for his comrade. The war has brought them together, if but for a moment.

For many Jews, if not all, the war experience on the eastern front brought about an intensification of Jewish identity through encounter with the Jewish population of the East. The positive, negative or neutral natures of that encounter reflect as much upon the nature of the Jewishness of the German soldier as upon the encounter itself. “Confirming the crude and radically contradictory images” writes Noah Isenberg, “Eastern Jews were seen as hagglers, parasites, thieves, and prostitutes, on the one hand, and as symbols of purity, faith, and unity on the other.”<sup>84</sup> What unites these contradictory images is the sense of the Eastern Jew as Other. As the German Jewish soldier encountered his ethnic “grandparents” in the East, he found his Jewish identification intensified even as he maintained his distance. What the Jewish identification of the German soldier meant for integration in the German army is the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>84</sup> Noah Isenberg, *Between Redemption and Doom: The Strains of German-Jewish Modernism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 56.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANTISEMITISM AND INTEGRATION

The World War I experience has been seen either as the highpoint of Jewish integration in the Old Germany, or alternatively as a cauldron of antisemitism that continued to brew until erupting with the Third Reich. This chapter will look at anecdotal evidence of how Jewish soldiers themselves reflected on antisemitism in the army, and at quantitative evidence for Jewish integration in the army in terms of promotion of Jews to the officer corps. The evidence will show that antisemitism was not the defining aspect of the Jewish war experience and that Jewish soldiers successfully integrated in the German army of the First World War.

“We feel today as German and Jew together as one,” a Jewish soldier writes home in December 1914, representing the initial elated spirit of the war.<sup>1</sup> The camaraderie in the field served to bridge gaps between soldiers of different backgrounds, whether geographical, socio-economic or religious. This phenomenon was not exclusive to the Jewish experience. “The finest thing of all,” writes the law student Kurt Schlener in December 1914 a couple weeks before his death at Ypres, “is the marvelous comradeship at the Front, fresh instances of which are always gladdening one’s heart. First of all there is the universal comradeship which runs through the whole German army and is shown by our calling each other ‘Du.’”<sup>2</sup> Schlener is impressed by the informality and gregariousness that marked life at the front. His reflections are mitigated in the minds of

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<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 12 December 1914, in Eugen Tannenbaum, ed., *Kriegsbriefer Deutscher und Österreichischer Juden* (Berlin, 1915), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated 9 December 1914, in Philipp Witkop, ed., *German Students’ War Letters*, trans. A.F. Wedd (Philadelphia: Pine Street Books, 2002), p. 26.

today's readers by his subsequent comparison of men making up the opposing Entente forces as "the motley crew of enemies facing us. Over there every man must first have a look to see whether the comrade appearing before him is of his own race or not—one could not very well respect a nigger as a comrade."<sup>3</sup> Germany, cut off from its few African colonies, was not able to employ multi-racial imperial troops the way that France and Britain could. Schleener's comment represents a common German nationalist perspective on the racial impurity of the French forces, but the argument from silence is that there is no racial mix in the German forces. Jews are a different religion, but not a different race.

While there were of course limits to the extent of army camaraderie,<sup>4</sup> many hoped that the war experience would resolve the social divisions of Wilhelmine Germany. Carl Zuckmayer, reflecting back in his 1938 autobiography on his time as a soldier at the front in August 1914, writes about a "breakdown of class spirit....For the first time we sons of the bourgeois class in the midst of spiritual storm and stress felt ourselves lifted above all the prejudices and pettinesses of home and family environment."<sup>5</sup> Historian Modris Eksteins explains how "in the trenches social barriers broke down as intellectuals became dependent on working-class men and aristocrats on crop farmers."<sup>6</sup> Jewish leaders and intellectuals hoped, of course, that the camaraderie of the Front would translate into a fuller accommodation of Jews into German society. "The difference between Christians and Jews," writes Jewish chaplain Brono Italiener, "so evident before the war, has surely

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> See Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 112-116.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Zuckmayer, *Pro Domo* (Scokholm, 1938), pp. 36-37, cited and translated in Hanna Hafkesbrink, *Unknown Germany: An Inner Chronicle of the First World War Based on Letters and Diaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1989), p. 230.

been mitigated....A greater understanding between Christians and Jews...in the era following the war...will be greeted by German Jews with great joy.”<sup>7</sup>

Hopes for a pluralistic future reflect not only the optimistic forecasting at the start of the war but also realistic appreciation for the differences in social makeup of society. Surely there was antisemitism in the army, as there was antisemitism everywhere. How severe was that antisemitism and how did it affect the nature of the war experience for Jewish soldiers?

### **Experiencing Antisemitism**

Joachim Friedrich Beutler, a twenty-year-old Jewish soldier, wrote home ten months before his death in Flanders that “I have never heard a thing of antisemitism here.”<sup>8</sup> Most Jewish soldiers, like their service records, are silent on the question of antisemitism in the army. Wary of the dangers of assigning weight to what is not said, a closer examination of specific cases of reported or apparent antisemitism will help clarify the nature of anti-Jewish prejudice in the war.

Less than two months into his service, Julius Marx writes from the western front:

For a while now it has become palpable to me that I am looked down upon as a Jew. Every prejudice seemed to have disappeared when the war began; there were only Germans. Now one hears the old, despicable expressions again. And suddenly one is all alone surrounded by

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<sup>7</sup> Bruno Italiener, *Von Heimat und Glauben: Kriegsbetrachtungen* (Darmstadt, 1916), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Joachim Friedrich Beutler, letter dated 8 January 1917, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Deutscher Juden* (Berlin, 1935), p. 12.

comrades whose plight one shares, to whom one has taken  
a liking, with whom one marches for the common goal.<sup>9</sup>

Marx is disturbed by the antisemitic attitudes of the comrades he encounters in the trenches. However, as he spends more time in the army, his own perception changes.<sup>10</sup> Describing the army camp, he notes with exclamation: “Among the people nothing is made of antisemitism!”<sup>11</sup> In a particularly telling incident not long after the first mentioning of antisemitism, Marx complains to his captain that he cannot remain in close quarters with the men who continuously insult him as a Jew. “You are a Jew?” the captain responds. “That I did not know, but now I understand. Listen, you do not need to stay with these sorts.” The captain goes on to commend Marx, promising him that he expects to grant him the Iron Cross, although he must first earn it. Later, Marx overhears the captain mentioning him to the lieutenant, who invites Marx into the officers’ quarters and provides him with a nice menu for dinner.<sup>12</sup> Marx goes on to earn his iron cross and promotion to the officer corps.

Julius Marx’s story does not discount the existence of antisemitism, especially among the less educated enlisted men. What Marx found, though, was that it did not interfere with his ability to seek advancement, and even, at times, enjoy his war

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<sup>9</sup> Julius Marx, *Kriegstagebuch eines Juden* (Frankfurt: Ner Tamid Verlag, 1964), p. 32. Entry for 5 October 1914. Translation here from Christhard Hoffmann, “Between Integration and Rejection: The Jewish Community in Germany, 1914-1918,” in John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> Christhard Hoffman, after citing the initial passage, fails to mention the change in Marx’s perception (see *ibid.*). See, in contrast, Eva G. Reichmann, “Der Bewusstseinswandel der Deutschen Juden,” in Werner E. Mosse, ed., *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution 1916-1923* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971), p. 514, where the transition to optimism is noted, with Marx’s diary described as “besonders hoffnungsvollen.”

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Kriegstagebuch*, p. 113, entry for 3 June 1916.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41, entry for 1 December 1914.

experience. How representative his experience was for Jewish soldiers is the question examined in this chapter.

Not all Jewish soldiers were as fortunate as Julius Marx in having such an accepting and encouraging commanding officer. While the previous chapter noted how German officers on the eastern front would rise for “Hatikvah,” the Zionist anthem, at the end of Yiddish theater productions in Vilna, not all officers would be without prejudice.<sup>13</sup> The German-Jewish émigré Friedrich Solon writes in his memoirs about his commander in the war as “an antisemite of the purest waters. He never directly articulated this, but it was clear enough how he thought of me.”<sup>14</sup> The antisemitism of his commanding officer was something Solon had to live with during the war, although he reports in the very same paragraph that two other Jews in the regiment besides himself earned the Iron Cross First Class, and that in 1918 he was promoted to officer-rank. Neither decorations nor promotions could ever happen without the recommendation of a soldier’s commanding officer. Solon goes on to recall specific instances of what he calls “acute antisemitism” in his war experience. Once, at an officers’ lunch, a major was expounding “in an antisemitic tone about the part of the Jews in the war loans. I spoke up and declared to him that I was a Jew.” Solon proceeds to defend his honor until another major intercedes on Solon’s behalf, attempting to calm things down, saying, “But my dear Herr Solon, we know that it is such and such.” In another instance, an officer who was visiting with Solon’s division made an antisemitic remark. “All the eyes of [my] comrades turned to

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<sup>13</sup> On German officers standing for the Hatikvah in Vilna, see Aviel Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe During the Great War,” in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Solon, “Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem 30. Januar 1933,” in Monika Richarz, ed., *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland: Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979), p. 441.

me,” he writes, but Solon opted this time to let the remark pass and the meal ended civilly. Whether he chose to respond or not, Solon’s role in such discussions was charged with his being Jewish, an identification he could not escape. At the same time, Solon seems to be searching his experiences in the German army for some explanation of how his country could so cruelly turn against him in later years. His account, recorded after the Nazi seizure of power, cannot be read divorced from that context.

In his 1924 book *Jewish Fighter Pilots of the World War*, Felix Theilhaber, documenting a wealth of information on German Jewish pilots, mentions antisemitism only five times as a factor in airmen’s experiences.<sup>15</sup> Air force fighter pilots were revered in the First World War as true heroes fighting single-combat duels in the sky. While the infantry fought mass mechanized battles with uncountable losses, the new technology of the airplane preserved, ironically, a last vestige of an older, more personalized and gallant warfare.<sup>16</sup> The air force was a coveted posting, often sought to no avail.<sup>17</sup> The Jewish banker Ernst Adolf Müller of Hannover, for example, while promoted to reserve lieutenant in 1915, still faced mixed reviews on his flying abilities in 1916 until he was finally admitted to the air squad in August 1916, only to die in an air bombing raid in November. His examiners were concerned with his nervousness and orientation in the

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<sup>15</sup> Felix A. Theilhaber, *Jüdische Flieger im Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1924), pp. 44, 53, 73, 74, 102. See Joachim Raich, “Gustav Samuel (1887-1954) Not a Comrade? The Story of a Jewish Airman with Royal Bavarian Schutztaffel 22,” *Over the Front: Journal of the League of World War I Aviation Historians* 15 (summer 2000): 159, 166-167 n. 8.

<sup>16</sup> On the war in the air as a “romantic” and “heroic” war, see Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Allen Lane, 1997), pp. 81-93. See also, on the broad cultural fascination with flying in the context of the war and the twenties, Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1989), pp. 241-274.

<sup>17</sup> Consider for example the response of the Jewish artillery officer Herbert Salzbach, recorded in his diary after learning of the denial of his request for flight training: “I receive news that I am *not* being posted away for flying training, the High Command explaining its refusal by stating that a serious shortage of artillery officers exists, and that such officers cannot be spared from their units in the near future. I have to put up with the news, and the others make this refusal an excuse for a big party—that makes me feel all right too!” (Herbert Salzbach, *With the German Guns: Four Years on the Western Front 1914-1918*, trans. Richard Thonger [Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003], p. 130).

air, not his religious background, or at least not on paper.<sup>18</sup> Theilhaber writes that the pilot Gustav Samuel was transferred out of his flying unit to the general infantry “because of antisemitic spirit of the flight corps or flight corps leader (*antisemitischen Geistes der Staffel oder des Staffelführers*).”<sup>19</sup> Recognizing that Theilhaber’s assessment that Gustav Samuel’s transfer out of the air force was based on Samuel’s own perception,<sup>20</sup> Joachim Raich argues in a recent article that the archival evidence does not support the interpretation that antisemitism played a role in the transfer. Looking at the relevant personnel files at the Bavarian military archives in Munich and papers from the estate of Samuel’s pilot Anton Neuber, Raich finds that Samuel’s transfer out of the air force “had nothing to do with his religion.”<sup>21</sup> Neuber was not satisfied with Samuel’s abilities,<sup>22</sup> and Samuel was also older than most noncoms of his age. “Of course,” writes Raich, “one cannot exclude that anti-semitism had played any role in the story of Samuel’s transfer, but without doubt one can exclude that Samuel’s Jewish background or antisemitism was the main or only reason for it.”<sup>23</sup> While Samuel himself may have perceived antisemitism as a cause for his frustrations, his personnel records and the diary of his pilot whose opinion would have held great weight make no mention of antisemitism, while they do cite other factors for his transfer.

Antisemitism may not have played a conscious role in the decision of Gustav Samuel’s superiors to transfer him from the air force to the infantry. Antisemitism, as a prejudice, can of course serve as an unconscious motivation for ill-treatment of Jews even

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<sup>18</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, Officer File 34507.

<sup>19</sup> Theilhaber, *Jüdische Flieger*, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Raich, “Gustav Samuel,” p. 167, n. 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

if not outwardly recognized or mentioned. A closer look at the experience of Jewish soldiers earning, or failing to earn, promotion in the war will help us understand the nature of the antisemitism perceived by some Jewish soldiers as well as the extent of successful integration that they experienced.

### **Promotion of Jewish Soldiers as Officers**

The fighter pilot Friedrich Rüdberg wrote to his brother Reinhold in April 1916 that he wanted to discuss with the flying school commander Kurt Schmickály about applying for promotion to officer-rank, and that “I plan to remind Schmickály of a potential problem (denomination); although I myself believe that this will not have much impact on my situation.”<sup>24</sup> Rüdberg resolves to tell his commander that he is Jewish, even though he does not expect antisemitism to become a factor. Eighty-five years later, the authors of an article on Rüdberg assume that it would have been an issue, commenting that by “referring to his ‘denomination’ Rüdberg means his being Jewish, a serious impediment for promotion to officer in the imperial army.”<sup>25</sup> Complaining in March of 1917 that no progress was being made in his application, Friedrich Rüdberg was appointed an officer-candidate in May 1917, awarded the Iron Cross First Class in August, and promoted to lieutenant in September 1917. He accounted the one-year delay from his application to candidacy to a sickly Captain Klepke, who was slow in

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<sup>24</sup> Cited and translated in Dov Gavisch and Dieter H.M. Gröschel, “Leutnant der Reserve Friedrich Rüdberg,” *Over the Front: Journal of the League of World War I Aviation Historians* 16 (summer 2001): 103.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130, n. 9. Interestingly, Gavisch and Gröschel cite the *Over the Front* article by Joachim Raich on Gustav Samuel, *op. cit.*, as support for their generalization on the difficulties faced by Jewish pilots facing promotion, even though Raich argues that antisemitism was *not* a determinative factor, as discussed above.

making decisions. A Lieutenant Scherz interceded on his behalf with the captain.<sup>26</sup> Once the application was put through, his promotion and field decoration were quick to follow. After the year-long delay in promotion process, or at least delay from his perspective, he did not associate the delay with antisemitism. He mentioned it as a concern to an earlier commander, but he does not report to his brother any concern that either of his commanders, or the process itself, was antisemitic.

Rüdenberg understood that the promotion process was quite bureaucratic. Shortly after first writing to his brother in April 1916 about his application for promotion, he wrote again that the application required financial guarantees and asked if his brother could oblige him.<sup>27</sup> Testimonials of financial support, usually from a father, or proofs of financial independence, were only one piece of the immense paperwork required in the submission of an application to become an officer. A standard application included much supporting paperwork, such as transcripts from secondary and university schools, academic letters of recommendation from professors, testimonials from either upstanding citizens or the police as to the character and social position of the applicant and his family, letters of recommendation from the field both from the applicant's commanding officer and another officer, an autobiographical sketch and a service record. Despite the tumult of battle and staggering losses, the army bureaucracy did not fail to meticulously collect and verify thick files of paperwork before approving promotions.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the delays which Friedrich Rüdenberg experienced were not at all unusual. Neither was the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 110, 114, 120.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>28</sup> Almost every officer personnel file at the Bavarian military archives in Munich contains a neatly bound folder of the application with the paperwork carefully organized.

information he received on 1 April 1917 that his application had been sent on to general command with “only one document still missing.”<sup>29</sup>

Historian Benjamin Ziemann, explaining the “the division of the army into officers and ordinary soldiers,” writes that “it remained very difficult to rise to the rank of reserve lieutenant without a one-year-volunteer certificate (*Einjährig-Freiwilligen Zeugnis*), which required completion of secondary education.”<sup>30</sup> Ziemann, writing about the experience of Bavarian farmers in the war, argues that the requirement for secondary education excluded most rural Bavarians from the officer corps. Jews with secondary educational and university backgrounds were not so excluded. While this is not to say that prejudice did not exist, and was not perceived, it is noteworthy that the system of military promotion that was devised to insure that only “gentlemen” of proper educational and financial attainments could serve as officers did not exclude Jews from that category, at least not in the war years.

Friedrich Rüdberg was not the only Jewish soldier to experience frustration with the bureaucratic delays in being promoted to lieutenant. Nathan Kahn, a thirty-year-old legal assistant from Nuremberg and army reservist, wrote to his military command on 30 August 1916 complaining about the non-action on his application for promotion to the officer corps. He carefully documents his meticulous collection of all the necessary paperwork, and reports his company commander’s explanation that his promotion was being held up due to bureaucratic delays. He was promoted to reserve lieutenant almost two years later, on 13 June 1918, three-and-a-half months before his death.<sup>31</sup> Kahn’s frustration is understandable. He became a reservist, a “one-year-volunteer,” in 1910

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<sup>29</sup> Gavish and Gröschel, “Leutnant Friedrich Rüdberg,” p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, officer file 42508.

after having completed his gymnasium studies. He moved up the lower ranks, already an Unteroffizier (non-commissioned officer) when he was sent to the front on 8 August 1914, and we are left to wonder why it took four years for him to achieve his promotion, or two years until he moved forward aggressively with his application. Was it due to antisemitism? Or perhaps his war career was not particularly exceptional. He does not mention antisemitism in his letter to the command, but of course one would not expect him to. And yet, his official complaint about the slow pace of his promotion process is unusual. The reason for his action is probably due to the fact that he received the Iron Cross Second Class on 5 August 1916. No doubt, the Iron Cross gave him the confidence to speak with his commanding officer and then aggressively complain in writing later that month that his promotion to lieutenant was not forthcoming. Nevertheless, his aggressive approach was ineffectual since his promotion did not come until June 1918. Perhaps it was slowed further as an antisemitic reprisal against an arrogant Jewish noncom who applied his legal advocacy skills against the military hierarchy. Or perhaps it was simply bureaucratic delays, as his commanding officer suggested.

Were Kahn's and Rüdberg's frustrations representative of the Jewish experience in the war? How can their experiences be explained in light of the many examples of Jewish soldiers who do not complain about promotion rate? The Jewish artillery lieutenant Herbert Salzbach from Frankfurt, for example, makes no mention of his being Jewish when he remarks in his diary that he and almost all his comrades had become officers: "We war volunteers, really a very jolly lot, who were together in one battery at Evricourt in 1915-16 and went through everything nice and nasty together, have now nearly all gone up to second lieutenant [i.e. *Leutnant*], each of us in a different

place.”<sup>32</sup> Salzbach, who received the Iron Cross First Class in August 1918,<sup>33</sup> does not report any experiences of antisemitism in his diary. He in fact never mentions being Jewish, which explains in part why his diary could have been published in Nazi Germany in 1935, marketed by the publisher along with a biography of Hitler.<sup>34</sup>

Other Jewish soldiers, on the other hand, did experience bureaucratic delays with promotion, like Kahn and Rüdénberg. What role, if any, did antisemitism play? Karl Mossman, a banker from Nuremberg and fourteen years older than Kahn, had joined the Bavarian reserves in 1901 and was promoted to lieutenant in 1909. Mossman’s army personnel file is filled with correspondence between Mossman and the Bavarian army command through 1911, 1912 and 1913 on the difficulties that Mossman faced in scheduling his examinations for further promotion.<sup>35</sup> He was promoted to Oberleutnant (i.e. first lieutenant) in wartime, July 1915, but a month after he was wounded and a month before he succumbed to his wounds in hospital.<sup>36</sup> Justin Kühn, a lawyer, also from Nuremberg and a year younger than Mossman, had joined the reserves in 1903 and became a lieutenant in 1907. He had also applied for promotion to Oberleutnant in 1909, and there is correspondence preserved in his file from 1910 to 1913 on his difficulties in scheduling the promotion examinations. And yet, just as with Mossman, he writes to command about the scheduling difficulties, and command responds with brief notes as to eligibility for future examinations--there is absolutely no hint that antisemitism played any role in the delays. Kühn specifically explains that it is obligations towards his clients

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<sup>32</sup> Herbert Salzbach, *With the German Guns*, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, foreword by Terence Prittie, p. 10. Prittie writes: “The book received enthusiastic reviews, even from Nazi newspapers and journals—whose editors must surely have been unaware that the author came from a Jewish family.”

<sup>35</sup> See below on the question of prewar antisemitism in the Bavarian army.

<sup>36</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, officer file 45122.

in his civil occupation as a lawyer that prevented him from appearing at the times the army offered. Unlike Mossman, there was no opportunity for Kühn to achieve promotion in wartime. He was killed on 8 October 1914, just a month into the war. He received the Iron Cross Second Class posthumously in mid-November 1914.<sup>37</sup>

Some Jewish soldiers, like Nathan Kahn and Friedrich Rüdberg, were frustrated at their progress towards promotion, while others like Herbert Salzbach were not. Older reservists, like Karl Mossman and Justin Kühn, may have found the rate of promotion frustratingly slow in peacetime, but entering the war as officers they experienced matters differently in wartime. The promotions did come, in all these cases, as did merit decorations, even posthumously.

Quantitatively, as well as qualitatively, it is difficult to find strong evidence for antisemitism in the wartime promotion practices of the German army. Was Nathan Kahn's wait for promotion unusually long? Looking at the service records of fifty-five Jewish officers in the Bavarian army, the average number of months that elapsed between entry into the service, usually as a one-year-volunteer, until promotion to the rank of reserve lieutenant was 50.6, whereas Nathan Kahn waited 93 months. However, the average is complicated since of the fifty-five officers in the sample, thirty-six of them, including Kahn, enlisted as reservists prior to the beginning of the war. Of the nineteen who enlisted once hostilities began, the average amount of months that elapsed until promotion to reserve lieutenant was only 24.9, whereas of those who enlisted in peacetime the average was 64.1. Promotion would have proceeded at a slower pace among reservists in peacetime because there was no practical need of new officers to take the place of those fallen in the field. Of the thirty-six officers who enlisted in peacetime,

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<sup>37</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, officer file 50829.

twenty-six of them received their commissions as reserve lieutenants during the war. Counting from the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, the average number of months that elapsed for these twenty-six Jewish soldiers before they were promoted to reserve lieutenants was 20.9. Since they entered the war already trained, and in various different enlisted and noncommissioned ranks, it is reasonable that they would achieve their promotions to the officer corps before the wartime enlistees. Overall, in wartime the average time elapsed until promotion was 22.6 months. (See Table 1.) Nathan Kahn received his promotion to reserve lieutenant 47 months after the war began. The flyer Friedrich Rüdberg waited 37 months, also a longer-than-average period (he entered the service on 15 September 1914).<sup>38</sup> Did Kahn and Rüdberg have reason for their frustration? Yes. Was their long wait common for Jewish soldiers? No.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE MONTHS BEFORE PROMOTION TO RESERVE LIEUTENANT<sup>39</sup>

	From Enlistment	From Outbreak of War	Size of Sample
Enlisted Peacetime	64.1	20.9	36 (26 wartime promotions)
Enlisted Wartime	24.9	n/a	19
Total Average	50.6	22.6	55

The data presented in Table 1 presents a clear decrease in time elapsed before promotion from peacetime to wartime. This is of course explainable by the full-time duty that reservists served in wartime, as well as the need to replenish the ranks as the army suffered heavy casualties. Although comparable figures for lieutenants in the Bavarian army as a whole are not available, one can safely assume that a similar decrease in time

<sup>38</sup>Gavish and Gröschel, “Leutnant Friedrich Rüdberg,” p. 100. He earned his commission on 18 September 1917 (p. 120).

<sup>39</sup>Analyzed from officer personnel files from Bavarian military archives, Munich.

elapsed between enlistment and promotion in wartime would be found. It would be a stretch to attribute the decrease to a drop in antisemitism, although on the other hand, antisemitism does not seem to have prevented the decrease from occurring.

### **Jewish Reserve Officers Before the War**

Historians have accepted as a given that antisemitism prevented Jewish integration in the German army before the war. “Anti-Semitism,” explains Martin Kitchen, “was one of the fundamental creeds of the German Officer Corps.”<sup>40</sup> While Jewish emancipation was consolidated in the German lands with the establishment of the Empire in 1871, entry to the army officer corps remained one of the few areas of society closed (by administrative practice, if not by law) to Jewish citizens. The exception to this rule was Bavaria. There, the king retained command of the Bavarian army, relinquishing supreme command to the kaiser only in case of war. The imperial war ministry, managing to evade constitutional commitments and continual political pressures in the Reichstag to permit Jews to serve as officers, had no authority over the peacetime Bavarian forces.<sup>41</sup> “Between 1885 and 1910,” writes Werner Angress, “approximately twenty to thirty thousand young Jewish soldiers served in the army as one-year-volunteers, and...until the outbreak of war in August 1914 there were, with the exception of Bavaria, no Jewish reserve officers in the German Empire.”<sup>42</sup> While Jews had served as officers in the Bismarckian wars, the Prussian army stopped promoting Jews in the 1880s, a change which correlates to the particular increase in political antisemitism at that

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Kitchen, *The German Officer Corps 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> See Werner T. Angress, “Der jüdische Offizier in der neuen deutschen Geschichte, 1813-1918,” in Ursula Breymayer, Bernd Ulrich and Karin Wieland, eds., *Willensmenschen: Über deutsche Offiziere* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

time.<sup>43</sup> The Jewish community and its allies focused their energies, unsuccessfully, on eliminating this element of discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Access to the officer corps was important to the Jews, a self-conscious minority, because of the social status of the reserve officer. As Werner Angress explains: “The social prestige of a Prussian reserve officer was quite disproportionate to the actual functional significance of a lieutenant or even a captain. To belong to the corps was an essential preliminary step towards a ‘respectable’ career, notably in state service, but also reassuring proof to the person concerned that he was a ‘*vornehmer Mann*’ [gentleman], since those who did not fit this category received no commission.”<sup>45</sup> The army dropped its exclusion of Jews from the officer corps once the war began. Martin Kitchen explains, with felicitous overstatement, that the Jews’ enthusiastic support for the war effort was “easily understandable, for the way was now open for a Jew to become a first-class human being, a Prussian Lieutenant.”<sup>46</sup> Jewish support for the war was due to a number of factors, as outlined in the first chapter. While the ability to achieve officer status may not have been one of them, but it was certainly an opportunity not lost on many of the ambitious young Jewish men serving in the war.

While Bavaria alone admitted Jews to the officer corps before the war, was the experience of Jewish reservists in Bavaria an escape from the more institutionalized Prussian antisemitism? Werner Angress leaves the question open, noting that Bavarian

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<sup>43</sup> See Werner T. Angress, “Prussia’s Army and the Jewish Reserve Officer Controversy before World War I,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 17 (1972): 24ff.

<sup>44</sup> See Angress, “Prussia’s Army and the Jewish Reserve Officer Controversy” (pp. 19-42), for a definitive discussion of this political story. Angress’s article is reprinted in James J. Sheehan, ed., *Imperial Germany* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 93-128. Citations here refer to the original Leo Baeck publication. See also Jacob Rosenthal, *An Episode of “Risches”? “The Counting of the Jewish Soldiers” in Germany in the First World War* (Jerusalem: Kibbutz Hameuchad and Leo Baeck Institute, 2005), ch. 1 (in Hebrew); Kitchen, *The German Officer Corps*, ch. 2; Manfred Messerschmidt, “Juden in preußisch-deutschen Heer,” in *Deutsche Jüdische Soldaten: Von der Epoche der Emanzipation bis zum Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, catalogue of travelling exhibition of the Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes (Hamburg: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1996), pp. 45-48.

<sup>45</sup> Angress, “Prussia’s Army and the Jewish Reserve Officer Controversy,” p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, p. 48.

Jews and Jews from other German states served as Bavarian reserve officers, but that the numbers were not great, and most of them served in the medical corps.<sup>47</sup> Martin Kitchen is less judicious in his treatment, writing, with, as will be shown, somewhat shaky support: “Bavaria enjoyed the reputation of being less antagonistic towards Jews, with the result that many Jews from northern Germany tried to go there for their period of military service. In fact the liberal attitude of the Bavarian authorities was largely a myth.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Hermann Rumschöttel writes: “First of all, one must destroy the legend that in the Bavarian army an enlightened, emotionless and normal relationship existed with the Jews.”<sup>49</sup> Kitchen bases his brief discussion of Jews in the Bavarian army on a brief note that appeared in 1909 in *Im deutschen Reich*, the monthly newspaper of the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, the central Jewish civil defense association in Germany. The 1909 note argues that the forty-six Jewish reserve officers and forty-two Landwehr (a guard service corps for those no longer in the army reserves) officers is a miniscule amount given the hundreds of Jews who sign up annually for reserve service in Bavaria. The author of the *Im deutschen Reich* note explains that he is writing in response to a statement that appeared a few months earlier in the newspaper that pointed out that even in Bavaria there is no discrimination based on religious confession, unlike in the Prussian and Imperial army.<sup>50</sup> Kitchen reports these statistics and assertions, having found this article in the Bavarian military archives in Munich with the handwritten marginal note of “pretty accurate” by the Bavarian war

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<sup>47</sup> Angress, “Der jüdische Offizier,” p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Hermann Rumschöttel, *Das bayerische Offizierkorps 1866-1914* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1973), p. 239.

<sup>50</sup> *Im deutschen Reich*, October 1908, p. 574.

minister.”<sup>51</sup> Kitchen in 1968, followed by Rumschöttel in 1973 and then Wolfgang Schmidt in 1996, all cite this brief report, specifically its observation that “Bavaria is following more and more in Prussia’s footsteps.”<sup>52</sup> That an unsigned paragraph in the newspaper of the Jewish defense organization accusing Bavaria of residual discrimination against Jews in the army should have been brought to the royal defense minister is not surprising. That the defense minister noted that the point was “pretty accurate” implies only that he acknowledged the allegation. The statistical datum, that there were eighty-eight Jewish and Landwehr officers, remains insufficiently analyzed outside of the political context of the discourse in 1909.

Rumschöttel provides a more solid statistical argument with figures from 1906. Of the 1,401 one-year-volunteers in the Bavarian army in that year, 131 were Jewish, that is, 9.35 per cent. And yet, only twenty-five of those Jewish soldiers were admitted to officer candidacy, or 19 per cent of Jewish reservists, as opposed to 45 per cent of the Christian soldiers who were promoted to officer candidacy. Further, there were only four promotions of Jews to reserve officer, a 16 per cent advancement of officer candidates, as opposed to 45 per cent of Christian officer candidates.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Jews were enlisting as reservists, but while some Jews were promoted to reserve lieutenants and higher, these promotions appear too few as they are disproportionate to the larger number of Jewish reservists.

The numbers that are missing from Rumschöttel’s study, as well as Kitchen’s, that would solidify the argument are the total of Jewish officers as opposed to the total of all

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<sup>51</sup> Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, p. 46, and note 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Im deutschen Reich*, May 1909, p. 279. The article appears on pp. 279-281. See Kitchen, *German Officer Corps*, p. 46; Rumschöttel, *Das bayerische Offizierkorps*, p. 252; Wolfgang Schmidt, “Die Juden in der Bayerischen Armee,” in *Deutsche Jüdische Soldaten*, p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> Rumschöttel, *Das bayerische Offizierkorps*, p. 251 and note 78.

officers in the Bavarian army. What percentage did Jews fill in the officer corps and how disproportionate was that to the number of enlisted Jewish reservists? Schmidt fills in this blank, finding the percentage of Jewish officers to fluctuate between 2.1 and 2.6 of the total officer corps in the years leading up to the war. (See Table 2.) These numbers

TABLE 2: JEWISH RESERVE OFFICERS AS PERCENTAGE OF BAVARIAN OFFICER CORPS<sup>54</sup>

Year	Jewish Reserve Officers	Percentage of Bavarian Officer Corps
1911	80	2.3
1912	85	2.1
1913	129	2.6

are indeed disproportionate to the 19 per cent figure that Rumschöttel offered, and Schmidt repeats, as the number of Jewish reservists in the Bavarian army in 1906.<sup>55</sup> If we are to assume a not-so-significant change in these numbers from 1906 to 1911-13, we can assert that the Jews were indeed underrepresented in the Bavarian officer corps.

However, the reality is not that simple. Schmidt, analyzing the distribution of Jewish reserve officers in 1911 in the Bavarian army, found that Jews were “overrepresented” in the train (transport) corps of the army. While the percentage of Jewish reserve officers in the infantry, cavalry, field artillery, foot artillery, engineering and explosives corps varied from 0 to 2.9 per cent of the total number of reserve officers in those sections, Jewish reserve officers constituted 17.5 per cent of the reserve officers in the train corps. Working with the 19 per cent figure for Jews among all reservists, that Jewish reserve officers should constitute 17.5 per cent of reserve officers in the train

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<sup>54</sup> Figures from Schmidt, “Die Juden in der Bayerischen Armee,” p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

corps is not so much an “overrepresentation,” as Schmidt terms, as it is an appropriately proportionate number. The higher percentage of Jewish reserve officers in the train corps cannot be simply explained as a preference, for whatever reason, by the Jews to elect, or by command assigned to, the train corps, because in absolute numbers there were thirty-one Jewish reserve officers in the train corps (out of a total of 177 reserve officers) while there were thirty Jewish reserve officers in the infantry (out of a total of 2,082 reserve officers).<sup>56</sup> Jewish reservists themselves or the command structure that was responsible for assignments did not seem to prefer the train corps for Jews over the general infantry, because in actual numbers about half of the Jewish officers served in the infantry while the other half were assigned to trains. The actual numbers, thirty-one here and thirty there, are too insignificant to indicate a pattern. What we do find is that while Jews were disproportionately represented among the officer corps in the general infantry, they were not disproportionately represented in the train corps. While the overall numbers still betray an under-representation of Jewish officers in the army as a whole, in at least the train corps the number of Jewish officers did reflect the number of Jewish soldiers.

The train corps was not the only division of the army where Jewish officers were well represented. Schmidt also analyzes Jewish medical and veterinary officers in 1911, 1912 and 1913, finding that while the percentage of Jews in the reserve veterinary officer corps varied from 1.7 to 4.4 per cent, the percentage of Jews in the reserve medical officer corps varied from 15.7 to 15.8 percent. The medical reserve officer corps is the more important number, as it was roughly ten times the size of the veterinary officer corps. In 1912, for example, 197 of the 1,220 reserve officers were Jewish, constituting

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

16.1 per cent.<sup>57</sup> Angress acknowledged as well that Jewish reserve officers were more numerous in the medical corps.<sup>58</sup> The higher representation of Jews in the medical corps can be explained by the general overrepresentation of Jews in the medical profession.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, while Jews may have faced discrimination in receiving promotions in certain areas of the army, in other areas they did not, and that the various ways of analyzing the numbers on the Jewish percentile of the Bavarian reserve officer corps do not produce shockingly small numbers for a minority who represented a mere 5.6 per cent of Germany's male student population, the sector of the population from which officer candidates were drawn.<sup>60</sup> That Jews had access to that sector of the rigidly stratified Wilhelmine societal structure, as opposed to Bavaria's rural population who were all but excluded by definition from the officer corps, argues for a more nuanced and relative understanding of "discrimination." Even during the war, when the officer corps of the rest of the Imperial army was opened to Jews, Bavarian farmers were "denigrated by training staff and officers from their training days in the replacement units onwards," Benjamin Ziemann tells us. "Insults included 'peasant pig,' 'stinking peasant' and 'peasant head.'"<sup>61</sup> The presence of antisemitism in Imperial Germany in general, and in the Bavarian army in specific, cannot be discounted. But neither does the evidence support the conclusion of Herman Rumschöttel regarding Jews in the Bavarian officer corps, that "between 1870 and 1914 the Jew was, for most Bavarian officers, a second

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>58</sup> Angress, "Der jüdische Offizier," p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> In 1908 Jews made up 25 percent of German medical students. See Marion A. Kaplan, "As Germans and Jews in Imperial Germany," in Marion A. Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 211.

<sup>60</sup> See Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 278, n. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, p. 77, and see pp. 72 and 81 on the educational requirements of entry to the officer corps that excluded by default Bavarian peasants.

class human being [*ein Mensch zweiter Klasse*].”<sup>62</sup> This is a judgment from hindsight, seeing a special path (*Sonderweg*) from the antisemitism of the prewar years to the racism of National Socialism, and is unsupported by the evidence.

### **Evidence for Integration in the Bavarian Army During the War**

Julius Marx retells in his diary how excited he was to meet a Bavarian Oberleutnant (first lieutenant) early in the war in October 1914, as “he was the first Jewish officer that I met since the outbreak of the war.”<sup>63</sup> While Marx was himself later to make lieutenant grade, it is understandable that the Jewish officer he meets early on in the war was Bavarian, since only the Bavarian army had been admitting Jews to the officer corps prior to the war. As noted above, even the Bavarian army may have retained some discriminatory tendencies towards Jews and others going into the war. Did these tendencies persist during wartime? Jews were no longer excluded from the officer corps in the Imperial army after the outbreak of the war. But were there other institutionalized discriminatory practices?

As explained above, Jewish reservists were promoted to reserve lieutenant at a faster rate during the war than during peacetime. (See above, Table 1.) That is to be expected with the exigencies of wartime, antisemitic prejudice notwithstanding. A more significant question is whether Jews were promoted during the war at the same rate as non-Jews. We have looked at the evidence for the underrepresentation of Jews in the Bavarian officer corps in the prewar years. Were wartime promotions blind to religious identification, or was promotion through the ranks more likely for Christian soldiers?

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<sup>62</sup> Rumschöttel, *Das bayerische Offizierkorps*, p. 254.

<sup>63</sup> Marx, *Kriegstagebuch*, p. 35, entry for 15 October 1914.

A telling anecdote is found in the memorial book of the Munich chapter of the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten. Its obituary for Lieutenant Hans Koch records that after spending almost a year in hospital recovering from what would prove to be a fatal wound from the Battle of the Somme, and after receiving decorations from Bavarian, Prussian and Austrian authorities, “in spring 1917 he was finally [*endlich*] promoted to reserve lieutenant in the Bavarian Infantry Guards-Regiment.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, Koch’s promotion had been approved in September 1916, just a month after he was wounded. His personnel file contains dozens of correspondence notes between his regiment and the Bavarian military headquarters in Munich between August 1916 and June 1917, when the promotion was granted, trying to determine if Hans Koch was alive and in which hospital he was lying.<sup>65</sup> The delay in promotion is explainable because, unlike decorations that were bestowed from military headquarters, the promotion to the officer corps was effected by the regiment, which was unaware of Koch’s condition or whereabouts. The extent to which a regiment in the field of battle went to locate a twenty-two-year-old wounded Jewish law student to bestow a promotion suggests that antisemitism played no role in Koch’s promotion to the officer corps. While his file is thick with the almost-year long effort to locate him, his religion is mentioned only twice, once in the standard questionnaire that asks for religion, and in passing in the reference of a Munich banker serving as part of Koch’s application for promotion. On paper his religion is inconsequential; nor does it appear to have hindered his integration in the army.

The recommendation from Koch’s own lieutenant and company leader, posted on 8 September 1916, makes clear that Koch’s promotion was fully merited.

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<sup>64</sup> Ortsgruppe München des Reichsbundes Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, ed., *Unseren Gefallenen Kameraden: Gedenkbuch für die im Weltkrieg Gefallenen Münchener Juden* (Munich, 1929), p. 129.

<sup>65</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, officer file for Koch, Hans (DOB 1.12.94).

“Unfortunately, on the retreat from the first line [after heroic actions], he was wounded....He would certainly have been the next to be promoted.”<sup>66</sup> In his commander’s words, Koch had performed valiantly under fire. He was wounded, and was thus transferred to a hospital in Munich. Had that not happened, and had he been able to remain at the front, he would certainly have received a commission in the field. Koch did receive his commission in his Munich hospital bed on 11 June 1917. A month later, on the evening of 15 July, he succumbed to his wounds.<sup>67</sup> Dying in his home city allowed his parents to bury him in a local Jewish cemetery. His tomb remains to this day, [see figure] where he is flanked by his parents at the old Jewish cemetery on



*The Koch family tomb in Munich, with the lieutenant buried between his parents (photo by D. Fine)*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The Munich memorial volume, *Unseren Gefallenen Kameraden*, is incorrect in reporting his death on 14 July. His personnel file and his tombstone mark his death as on 15 July.

Thalkirchnerstrasse in Munich. While his father was a successful Munich businessman, Lieutenant Koch's gravestone marks the centerpiece of the family plot, lying between his parents. The inscription notes his regiment, rank and decorations, with a decorative sculpture of helmet and sword. While it may have been difficult to locate him when he was wounded, the location of his burial is duly noted in his army file.<sup>68</sup>

A story of the successful integration of a Jewish officer in the army is that of Oberleutnant Heinrich Kohn, who had a stellar military resume before his death by American guns in late September 1918. Born in Stuttgart, Kohn was a law student in Munich when the war broke out. He had joined the reserves in 1912, and was promoted to lieutenant in November 1914. He made Oberleutnant in March 1918, having earned the Iron Cross first and second classes, and Bavarian decorations. Kohn was an artillery officer, and in a letter to his family in 1916 he proudly retells a conversation he had with an artillery general, von Schubert. The general asks Kohn if he is an active officer, to which Kohn responds that he is not. "What do you do then, when not at war?" "I am a law student, your Excellency!" "Have you finished then?" "No, your Excellency!" "Which semester?" "Second, your Excellency; the remainder of my post-secondary years [*außergymnasialischen Lebens*] have been with the military." The general then notes that while he has been with the army, his colleagues back home have all progressed with their studies. How will he manage when he returns home, what will he do? "By your command, your Excellency!" Kohn responds with a smile. "So what will you do?" the general asks again. "I do not know!" responds the twenty-two-old lieutenant. "Will you not remain, as an active officer?" "By your command, your Excellency!" implying that

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<sup>68</sup> For the inscription on his tomb, see Israel Schwierz, *Für das Vaterland starben: Denkmale und Gedenktafeln bayerisch-jüdischer Soldaten: Dokumentation* (Aschaffenburg/Main: Eduard Krem-Bardischweski, 1998), p. 198.

Kohn will accede to his general's invitation and remain as an active officer after the war.<sup>69</sup>

General von Schubert may not have known that Heinrich Kohn was Jewish, although a law student named "Kohn" should have indicated as much. His own field commander certainly did know when he wrote his recommendation on 12 May 1914 for Kohn's promotion to lieutenant. After praising Kohn's spiritedness, temperament and interest in all things military, the referring officer goes on to explain how well composed Kohn is at the front, quick-thinking, and energetic with the men. The recommendation praises Kohn's overall ability in field service and in leading men, whereas off-duty he is "cultured [*gebildet*] and well-read, always extremely tactful and unassuming." That is, Officer-Candidate Kohn would make, both in the field and off-duty, a model officer. The recommendation continues: "Kohn is Jewish [*israelit*]; the characteristic qualities of his race [*Stammesgenossen*] make Kohn rather, as much as I can determine on this basis, assertive in his convictions. Kohn appears to me as especially fit for promotion."<sup>70</sup> The referee's mention of Kohn's "race" should not be misunderstood as necessarily antisemitic. Words like "race," "tribe" and "people" have different valences dependent on the context, and here there is nothing to suggest hostility. Historian Till van Rahden has traced how "Stamm" became one of the preferred modes of Jewish self-referral.<sup>71</sup> Nor should one suggest that the intent here is to apologize for Kohn's Jewishness, that he is officer-quality "despite" his religion. The referee seems to counter that suggestion by remarking how his being Jewish seems to have added to Kohn's strength of character.

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<sup>69</sup>Heinrich Kohn to his family, 29 September 1916, in *Unseren Gefallenen Kameraden*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>70</sup> Bavarian military archives in Munich, officer file 14599.

<sup>71</sup> Till van Rahden, "Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*: Visions of Community between Nationalism and Particularism, 1850-1933," in Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer and Mark Roseman, eds., *German History from the Margins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 27-48.

Additionally, one could note that Kohn is referred to here as “israelit,” the adjective preferred by most Jews, rather than “jüdisch” which carried more antisemitic associations. Kohn’s case is instructive because whereas the religion of the officer candidate is usually ignored in the army paperwork (although it is always dutifully reported), here it is mentioned in positive terms.

Kohn’s successful integration in the army is reported to his mother by the battalion commander in his letter of condolence after Kohn’s death. “In the name of the entire officer corps I speak with our collective sadness. Oberleutnant Kohn was militant and spirited...an excellent leader....Despite his youth he was the first of our regiment to complete the officer training course....A bright future stood before him.” Instead, wrote the major, he received “for the sake of Germany’s greatness and future, the hero’s death.”<sup>72</sup> From what we know of him, Oberleutnant Heinrich Kohn did not suffer from antisemitism during his service in the war.

Having examined anecdotal evidence, we turn now to quantitative analysis. One way to approach this question of Jewish integration in the army quantitatively is to look at the average age of fallen Jewish reserve lieutenants in the Bavarian army, and to compare that to the average age of a wider sample of fallen reserve lieutenants. Since most reserve lieutenants became one-year-volunteers at roughly the same stage in life, that is, after completion of secondary schooling, their age at the time of death in the war will reference how quickly they advanced to reserve lieutenant. One would expect that capable and qualified enlisted men would be promoted to noncoms, noncoms to lieutenants, and a Leutnant to an Oberleutnant (i.e. a full lieutenant), Oberleutnant to

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<sup>72</sup> Major and Battalion Commander Strobel to Berta Kohn, 2 October 1918, in *Unseren Gefallen Kameraden*, pp. 218-219.

Hauptmann (captain), etc., through the ranks during the war years. Assuming that Jewish and Christian soldiers would have the same innate abilities to earn promotion or not during war, the only explanation for a slower rate of promotion for Jews would be antisemitism. Conversely, if there is no discrepancy, then the most reasonable explanation would be the integration of Jews in the army and relative irrelevance of antisemitism.

This quantitative comparison looks only at reserve lieutenants since the sample of Jewish officers studied from their personnel files at the Bavarian military archives in Munich, the fallen Jewish officers in the Bavarian army, contains too small a number of other ranks to offer a reliable comparison. (See Table 3.) Finally, the reliability of the

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF RANKS OF FALLEN JEWISH OFFICERS IN BAVARIAN ARMY (IN ASCENDING RANK ORDER)

Leutnant der Reserve	50
Leutnant der Landwehr	2
Oberleutnant der Reserve	2
Oberleutnant der Landwehr	1
Hauptmann der Reserve	3
MEDICS	
Feldunterarzt	1
Oberarzt	4
Stabarzt	2
TOTAL	65

sample for Jewish reserve lieutenants is premised on the assumption that those who fall in combat represent a random sample of those who served.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> On the overrepresentation of officers among casualties, see below.

Analyzing the fifty fallen Jewish reserve lieutenants by birth year, we find that on average they were born in the first half of August 1889. (See Table 4.) The analysis is based on year of birth rather than actual age at time-of-death because working with year-of-birth is a simpler computation when the purpose of the analysis is to measure the distribution of age rather than precise length of life. Additionally, date-of-birth alone was a better index in forming the control sample, as will be shown further below. The numerical average birth year is 1889.7, that is, 1889 and seven tenths, which translates into early August 1889. We must now compare this average with a control sample of reserve lieutenants to determine if the Jewish lieutenants were younger or older or the same age as the general average. That data can be culled from the Bavarian regimental

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF AGE OF FALLEN JEWISH RESERVE LIEUTENANTS BY BIRTH YEAR

Year of birth	Number born	Year of birth	Number born
1879	1	1889	4
1880	1	1890	4
1881	2	1891	3
1882	2	1892	2
1883	0	1893	4
1884	3	1894	8
1885	1	1895	5
1886	4	1896	0
1887	2	1897	0
1888	2	1898	2
Total	50		
Numerical Year Average:	1889.7		
Translates into:	First half of August 1889		

infantry reserve histories. Regimental histories were published for each regiment during the interwar years. These volumes were essentially commemorative narrative histories of the exploits of the regiment in the war. Many of them also contain an “Ehrentafel” or “Ehrenliste” (“Table of Honor” or “List of Honor”) of the names of those in the regiment who were lost in the war. Some of these tables contain personal information, such as rank and date-of-birth. Some also gave date-of-death, but not all. Date-of-birth was used as a means of distinguishing between soldiers of the same or similar names, so this is why year-of-birth was used rather than actual age at death as the index here for computation of age of fallen reserve lieutenants, since data on actual age at death was not as readily available. The data was collected from nine reserve infantry regiments, constituting a total sample of 302 fallen reserve lieutenants.<sup>74</sup> The computation yields an overall numerical average of 1889.3, which translates into the second half of March 1889. (See Table 5.) This compares to the computation of early August 1889 as the average age of fallen Jewish reserve lieutenants. Therefore, fallen Jewish reserve lieutenants in the Bavarian army were on average four-and-a-half months *younger* than most fallen reserve lieutenants. While this is an insignificant difference to support an argument that Jews were more likely to be promoted than Christians, it does argue that Jews were not discriminated against during the war when it came to promotions to the officer corps. These figures suggest that the Jews were well integrated in the army during the war.

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<sup>74</sup>Two qualifications: 1) Some of the Ehrenliste asterisk certain ranks as posthumous. Posthumous ranks are used here rather than ranks at times-of-death. Since the promotion process was often tediously bureaucratic, noncoms at times did not live long enough for the army bureaucracy to keep up with them. Nevertheless, the promotions were earned, never given solely as posthumous consolation for the families. 2) Some of the Ehrenliste differentiate between their own fallen and those who fell with the regiment but belonged to a different regiment. These are excluded from this computation because of the concern that they would probably be listed in their own regiments as well. Erring on the side of exclusion is better than double-listing.

TABLE 5: AVERAGE AGE OF FALLEN RESERVE LIEUTENANTS IN SELECTED ROYAL BAVARIAN RESERVE INFANTRY REGIMENTS (CONTROL SAMPLE)

	Birth year (numerical average)	Birth year and month	Size of Sample
2nd Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>75</sup>	1888.7	early August 1887	38
6th Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>76</sup>	1887.9	late October 1887	33
8 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>77</sup>	1889.3	late March 1889	21
10th Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>78</sup>	1889.8	late September 1889	40
12th Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>79</sup>	1888.4	late April 1888	45
16 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>80</sup>	1889.3	late March 1889	44
17th Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>81</sup>	1889.9	late October 1889	33
18th Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>82</sup>	1891.2	early February 1891	27
19 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>83</sup>	1890.2	early February 1890	21
TOTAL <sup>84</sup>	1889.3	late March 1889	302

Analyzing the rate of promotion of Jews to the officer-class is one index of integration. Another analogously quantitative index would be to examine the ratio of Jewish soldiers in the army of those who served as enlisted men, as noncoms (NCOs) and officers, and to compare that ratio to the general army. Did Jews serve primarily in the lower ranks, or were they promoted to noncom and officer ranks proportionately to the

<sup>75</sup> Max Helbling, Ernst Ritter von Brunner and Martin Ritter von Dittelberger, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 2* (Munich, 1926), Ehren-Liste appendix, pp. 1-68.

<sup>76</sup> Oskar Bezzel, *Das Königlich Bayerische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 6* (Munich, 1934), pp. 271-331.

<sup>77</sup> Herbert Ritter von Wurmb, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 8* (Munich, 1929), pp. 213-263.

<sup>78</sup> Hans Etzel, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 10* (Munich, 1930), pp. 154-157.

<sup>79</sup> Ernst Demmler, Karl Ritter von Wucher and Ludwig Leupold, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 12* (Munich, 1934), pp. 297-367.

<sup>80</sup> Fridolin Solleder, *Vier Jahre Westfront: Geschichte des Regiments List R.J.R. 16* (Munich, 1932), pp. 387-502.

<sup>81</sup> August Grossmann and Dr. Merkt, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 17* (Augsburg, 1926), vol. 2, pp. 3-76.

<sup>82</sup> Julius Trumpp, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 18* (Munich, 1928), pp. 303-351.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Jaud and Friedrich von Weech, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 19* (Munich, 1933), pp. 249-251.

<sup>84</sup> Total numerical average is not based on the column of regimental numerical averages, but on the entire sample, since the object is to determine an average age of fallen reserve lieutenants in the army as a whole, not specific to regiments.

general population? If, for example, there were one officer for every two noncoms for every five enlisted men overall in the army, but the Jewish ratio was one officer for every five noncoms for every ten enlisted men, then it would appear that the Jews were poorly integrated since Jews served primarily in the lower ranks and were not integrated beyond that. If, however, the ratio were the same, then that would imply that Jews were integrated. If the ratio were the other way—that there were, for example, ten Jewish officers for every five noncoms for every one enlisted man—then it would appear that the Jews were extremely successful in attaining integration in the army. What were the ratios of Jewish service vis-à-vis the overall make-up of the army in terms of enlisted men, noncoms and officers?

Ranks in the German army were generally divided into these three basic groupings: 1) enlisted soldier (*Manschaftsdienstgrad*), 2) non-commissioned officer (*Unteroffizier*), and 3) officer (*Offizier*).<sup>85</sup> As in all armies, the soldiers are dispersed in rank in a pyramidal structure, so that we can expect the most amount of soldiers to be enlisted, then noncoms, and then officers. The ratio of officers to noncoms to enlisted men varies from the type of military unit involved, and whether or not one includes medical and reserve officers, which would increase the ratio of officers to soldiers. However, an overall pre-war ratio can be inferred from a 1913 German armaments increase that provided for new military personal of 4,000 officers, 14,900 noncoms and 117,000 men, yielding a ratio of 1 to 3.7 to 29.3.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Ian Passingham, *All the Kaiser's Men: The Life and Death of the German Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p. 251 for a list of German ranks and their English equivalents.

<sup>86</sup> On the 1913 armaments increase see V.R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 130. See also Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany*, vol. 2: *The European Powers and the Wilhelminian Empire, 1890-1914*, translated by Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970), p. 225.

Any estimates on the ratio of officers to noncoms to enlisted men among Jewish soldiers needs to be based upon samples of fallen officers where the information is available. The memorial volume for the roughly 12,000 fallen Jewish soldiers in the German army published by the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten in 1932, the *Gedenkbuch*, counts 322 officers and 185 medical officers among the 12,000 Jewish casualties.<sup>87</sup> Excluding the medics from the calculation, the ratio of 322 to 12,000 is 1 to 37.27. The *Gedenkbuch*, then, reports a ratio of one Jewish officer for every 37.3 Jewish soldiers. While the *Gedenkbuch* does not give us the total of noncoms, the ratio of officers to enlisted men shows that there were fewer Jewish officers in comparison to Jewish enlisted man as there were officers to enlisted men in the army as a whole, according to the general pre-war ratio of 1 to 3.7 to 29.3.

A similar picture can be drawn from the samples of fallen Jewish soldiers in the Jewish cemeteries of Frankfurt and Berlin. The stone inscriptions in cemeteries provide more workable samples of rank distributions than the thousands in the *Gedenkbuch*, and also provide a check on the numbers and proportions culled from the *Gedenkbuch* since there are a few names of fallen Jewish soldiers in the cemeteries that are not listed in the *Gedenkbuch*. While most casualties of the war were buried in mass national cemeteries at the front, city cemeteries in Germany do have World War I sections, mostly for soldiers who made it back to Germany and then died of their wounds. The Jewish military cemetery in Frankfurt contains fifty graves. The cemetery is located within the Jewish cemetery on Rat-Beil Strasse, which is itself attached to the Main Cemetery (Hauptfriedhof) of Frankfurt. The Jewish military section is separated from the

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<sup>87</sup> *Die jüdischen Gefallenen des deutschen Heeres, der deutschen Marine und der deutschen Schutztruppen 1914-1918: Ein Gedenkbuch*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1932), p. 419, n. 1.



*A stone from the Ehrenfeld of the Jewish Cemetery in Frankfurt (photo by D. Fine)*

surrounding Jewish cemetery by hedges, and also by a stone-step entry through five-foot walls. The area is called the “Ehrenfeld,” or Field of Honor, as the military sections of Jewish cemeteries are often called. The rectangular field is lined by rows of stones on each side. Although the rows are militarily straight, they are not exactly even in number.

On the left side the rows are made up of four, eleven, ten and two stones. On the right side the rows are made up of two, ten and eleven stones. The apparent symmetry but lack of total symmetry implies that the cemetery was filled over time rather than all at once.

While the Frankfurt sample is small, the largest sample of Jewish soldiers that can be gleaned from gravestone evidence can be found at the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, Berlin. The Jewish military cemetery in Berlin is located within the large Jewish cemetery in the Berlin suburb of Weissensee. This cemetery, opened in 1880, is the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe, containing over 115,000 graves.<sup>88</sup> The *Ehrenfeld*, opened in 1927, is situated toward the rear of the cemetery. With its 359 graves, the World War I section of the Weissensee cemetery is the largest Jewish military cemetery in the world outside of Israel. Some of the graves were given to veterans who died up through 1940 (an indication of the respect given to all veterans—even Jewish ones—in the Nazi period), but the vast majority of the graves are of wartime casualties, mostly Berliners or other Jewish soldiers who died near Berlin. It is a cemetery within a cemetery, separated by stone walls and hedges. There is an upper and lower area, with the headstones facing each other in parallel lines. The upper section is shaped as a semi-circle, with headstones along the semi-circle back-wall. A monument stands in the back center of the upper section. The landscaping, with stone benches throughout, establishes the pastoral quality of the design.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Johanna von Koppenfels, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin* (Berlin: Quintessenz Verlag, 2000), p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> On this Jewish military cemetery, see Sabine Hank and Hermann Simon, “*Bis der Krieg uns lehrt, was der Friede bedeutet*”: *Das Ehrenfeld für die jüdischen Gefallenen des Weltkrieges auf dem Friedhof der Berliner Jüdischen Gemeinde* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2004).



*The Ehrenfeld at the Weissensee Jewish cemetery in Berlin (photo by D. Fine)*

Analysis of the ranks breakdown of the graves in Berlin yields a count of 13 officers, 50 noncoms and 265 soldiers. The remaining graves belong to medics and other miscellaneous services that are not included here. The Berlin cemetery sample of Jewish soldiers yields a ratio then of 1 officer to 3.8 noncoms to 20.4 enlisted men. Comparing that to the overall 1913 armaments increase ratio of 1 to 3.7 to 29, here we see that there were more Jewish officers to enlisted men. That is, according to the Berlin sample there was 1 Jewish officer for every 20.4 Jewish enlisted men, as opposed to 1 officer for every 29.3 men in the army as a whole.



*A stone from the Ehrenfeld of the Weisensee Jewish cemetery in Berlin (photo by D. Fine)*

The Berlin number may not be that different from the *Gedenkbuch* number if we consider that the summary numbers presented there for enlisted men may include the noncom ranks. Yet even fewer Jewish officers per Jewish enlisted men would not be unexpected, given that Jews were only permitted to serve as officers in the German army (with the important exception of Bavaria) since the outbreak of the war in 1914. One would expect, then, that the Jews would be underrepresented, proportionally, in the officer corps. The fact that the Berlin sample shows the Jews as overrepresented, proportionally, as officers is a strong argument of successful integration.

One more ratio of Jewish officers to enlisted men is presented by Franz Josef Strauss in his foreward to the *War Letters of Fallen German Jews* published in 1961. Basing himself on Jewish statistics from the war but also possibly on internal German military statistics, Strauss claims that there were 100,000 Jews in the service, of whom over 2,000 were officers. Clearly these are round numbers, and the 100,000 includes 1200 medics. If we subtract the medics, then we find a ratio of 1 to 49.4.<sup>90</sup>

While reference here has been to a pre-war general ratio of 1 officer per 3.7 noncoms per 29.3 enlisted men (based on a 1913 armaments increase), it must be acknowledged that during the war the ratios would have been in flux as the army experienced heavy casualties. Additionally, it would have been easier to replace enlisted men than officers. Noncoms could be promoted from the ranks, whereas promotion to officer rank was slower, especially given the culturally conservative officer corps and its hesitancy to admit anyone other than “gentlemen” to its class. An overall general ratio can be gleaned from the regimental histories, many of which summarize the casualties into the three basic tiers, as well as medics.

Twelve different regimental histories from the Bavarian army were considered here. Some lists included all casualties, such as those killed-in-action, died of wounds, wounded and missing-in-action. Others restricted the list, but that should not affect the ratios that we are looking for. The absolute numbers are less important for this inquiry than the proportion between the ranks. Medics are not considered here, and consideration has only been given to reserve infantry regiments since those were the regiments in which Jews were most likely to serve, so the general ratios are most accurate as comparisons.

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<sup>90</sup> Franz Josef Srauß, foreward to *Kriegsbrieife Gefallener Deutscher Juden* (Stuttgart: Sewwald Verlag, 1961).

Adding up the numbers of casualty officers, noncoms and enlisted men of the twelve reserve infantry divisions considered yields 1,976 officers, 13,505 noncoms, and 110,740 enlisted men. The ratio is one officer per 6.8 noncoms per 56 enlisted men. (See Table 6.)

As might be expected, the proportion of officers in relation to noncoms and enlisted men has shifted significantly. There is almost double the proportion of enlisted soldiers, and double the proportion of noncoms. Officer casualties were slower to replace. Noncoms could be promoted from the ranks and assume officer functions in war until new officers arrived. That the proportional number of officers in relation to noncoms and enlisted men decreased in the general army, as demonstrated through the casualty numbers of Bavarian reserve infantry divisions, is not surprising given the conditions of war. One would expect a similar proportional shift in the Jewish numbers. And yet, as has been shown, the Jewish wartime numbers show far fewer enlisted men per noncoms and officers. (See Table 7.) There are insufficient numbers for Jewish pre-war samples. But during the war, we see that there were proportionately more Jews serving as officers and noncoms than in the general army population.

The methodological assumption used here so far is that casualties are random. However, officers did fall at a higher rate than others. World War I historian Jay Winter asserts that “officer casualty rates were approximately twice those of men in the ranks.”<sup>91</sup> As explained by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, “both non-commissioned officers and officers, fighting at the head of their troops, were most

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<sup>91</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 86.

exposed to danger and usually had a higher casualty rate than their men.”<sup>92</sup> While artillery assaults hit randomly, officers did lead men and as such were more in harm’s way. Officer and noncom casualty rates would therefore overstate the number of officers and noncoms in proportion to enlisted men. To correct for this misrepresentation, the proportions developed here can be adjusted by halving the number of officers and noncoms in relation to enlisted men. (See Table 8.) These adjustments show a dramatic increase in the proportion of officers and noncoms to enlisted men from the general peacetime estimate, although such a fluctuation is to be expected in wartime when casualties were heavy and the ranks were easier to replenish than noncoms and officers. The adjustments further indicate that there were even more Jewish officers and noncoms per enlisted men than the general rates. The adjusted proportions suggest that there were roughly twice as many Jewish officers per enlisted men than the general rates, a strong indication for successful Jewish integration in the army.

The proportional overrepresentation of Jews as army officers might be explained as due to disproportionate levels of education attained by Jews in comparison with the general population. That is, one might argue that since the average Jew was better educated than the average non-Jew, and since education was an important factor in promotion to the officer corps, the average Jew was more likely than the average non-Jew to win promotion. While it is true that educational attainment was valued in all Jewish cultures, the statistical differences between the Jewish and the general population in pre-war Germany are not overly dramatic. According to Marion Kaplan, Jewish men attended university in Germany at a rate of “about five times greater than the Jewish

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<sup>92</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 144.

percentage of the general population.”<sup>93</sup> That number is qualified by the fact that the German Jewish pre-war population did not amount to much more than 1 percent of the total population, so that Jews did not constitute, as already noted above, more than 5.6 percent of the general German male student population.<sup>94</sup> But even it were so that Jews were better educated on average to make a substantial difference in the number of Jewish officers in the army, it is important to note that that factor does not appear to be mitigated by antisemitic prejudice, a prejudice that had been institutionalized by the prohibition of Jews serving as officers in the general German army (as opposed to the Bavarian army) until 1914. The proportional representation of Jewish officers in the German army indicates that antisemitism did not play any substantive role in the integration of Jews in the army during the war.

TABLE 6: OFFICER, NONCOM AND ENLISTED CASUALTIES IN ROYAL BAVARIAN RESERVE INFANTRY REGIMENTS

	Officers	Noncoms	Enlisted Men
2 <sup>nd</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>95</sup>	207	1,309	9,981
7 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>96</sup>	200	1,174	8,759
8 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>97</sup>	143	965	7,049
10 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>98</sup>	187	1,273	9,457
12 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>99</sup>	174	1,094	8,594
13 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>100</sup>	217	1,433	14,542
16 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>101</sup>	187	1,393	10,959

<sup>93</sup> Kaplan, *Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, p. 138.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, and p. 278, n. 11. See also Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, p. 211.

<sup>95</sup> Hebling, Brunner and Dittelberger, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 2*, p. 154.

<sup>96</sup> Otto Schaidler, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 7* (Munich, 1934), p. 239.

<sup>97</sup> Wurmb, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 8*, p. 196.

<sup>98</sup> Etzel, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 10*, p. 158.

<sup>99</sup> Demmler, Wucher and Leupold, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 12*, p. 368.

<sup>100</sup> Ludwig Stammberger, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 13* (Munich, 1921), p. 48.

<sup>101</sup> Solleder, *Vier Jahre Westfront: Geschichte des Regiments List R.J.R. 16*, p. 381. In this case the casualties are divided between killed-in-action and wounded. Both sets of numbers are combined for this table and computation.

17 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>102</sup>	142	1,240	10,830
18 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>103</sup>	119	891	7,292
19 <sup>th</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>104</sup>	90	699	5,612
21 <sup>st</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>105</sup>	182	1,198	10,795
23 <sup>rd</sup> Res. Inf. Reg. <sup>106</sup>	128	836	6,870
TOTAL	1,976	13,505	110,740
Total ratio	1	6.8	56

TABLE 7: PROPORTIONS OF OFFICERS TO NONCOMS TO ENLISTED MEN

	Officers	Noncoms	Enlisted Men
Jews: <i>Gedenkbuch</i> sample <sup>107</sup>	1	n/a	37.3
Jews: Frankfurt sample	1	7	32
Jews: Berlin sample	1	3.8	20.4
Jews: Strauss Preface	1	n/a	49.4
General: pre-war sample	1	3.7	29.3
General: war sample (Table 6)	1	6.8	56.0

TABLE 8: PROPORTIONS OF OFFICERS TO NONCOMS TO ENLISTED MEN ADJUSTED TO ACCOUNT FOR DOUBLE OFFICER AND NONCOM CASUALTY RATES

	Officers	Noncoms	Enlisted Men
Jews: <i>Gedenkbuch</i> sample <sup>108</sup>	1	n/a	74.5
Jews: Frankfurt sample	1	7	64
Jews: Berlin sample	1	3.8	40.8
Strauss preface	1	n/a	49.4
General: pre-war sample <sup>109</sup>	1	3.7	29.3
General: war sample (Table 6)	1	6.8	112.1

<sup>102</sup> Grossman and Merkt, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 17*, vol. 1, p. 114.

<sup>103</sup> Trumpp, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 18*, p. 353.

<sup>104</sup> Jaud and Weech, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 19*, p. 252.

<sup>105</sup> Julius Ritter von Braun, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 21* (Munich, 1923), p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> Karl Roth, *Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 23* (Munich, 1927), p. 218.

<sup>107</sup> Enlisted number probably includes noncoms, as discussed above.

<sup>108</sup> Enlisted number probably includes noncoms, as discussed above.

<sup>109</sup> The pre-war sample proportion and the proportion from the Strauss preface remain static because no adjustment for casualty rates is applicable before 1914.

## **Integration Without Antisemitism**

This chapter has sought to offer both anecdotal and quantitative evidence for the successful integration of the Jews into the German army in World War I. There were certainly instances of antisemitism, but it was not a major facet of the war experience for most Jewish soldiers. Certain Jews may have perceived antisemitism, real or imagined, but the question must be asked whether there is any evidence that antisemitic attitudes affected the experience of the Jews in the army in any substantive way. The evidence does not support such an interpretation.

A closing anecdote for this chapter can serve as another example of how antisemitism does not seem to have been a determinative issue. Lieutenant Ernst Joachim Werner of Bamberg, university educated attorney and Iron Cross Second Class, took his own life in the privacy of his army quarters on 8 August 1917 at the age of thirty years. The typed report of his death in his military file explains how he had been found dead in his room on the morning of 9 August after the commanding officer ordered the room broken into when the lieutenant was missing. The door had been locked from the inside. There was no sign of prior forced entry and he was shot in the heart, with the pistol lying there in the room. The staff physician determined that it was a suicide. The report then states that the commanding officer “wanted to spare his [Werner’s] parents these shameful details (*Diese Schande wollte er seinem Eltern ersparen*).” The following day, 10 August, a telegram was sent by the division to Werner’s parents informing them that their son had been seriously wounded in battle, and soon after succumbed to his wounds.

On 13 August, Werner's father, a practicing attorney in Bamberg, acknowledged receipt of the news that his son had fallen on the field of honor (*auf dem Felde den Ehre*).<sup>110</sup>

An antisemitic commander would have dismissed the suicide of a Jewish officer who was an attorney in civilian life as an act of cowardice before the enemy and a shirking of duty. Instead, the army treated the case with compassion and dignified restraint. Some soldiers will commit suicide when confronted with the ongoing onslaught of artillery, danger and helplessness that come with life in the trenches. The trauma of trench warfare was the likeliest cause of the suicide of Ernst Joachim Werner. While so many German Jews committed suicide during the Nazi years, Werner's Jewishness probably had nothing to do with his fatal despair on the western front.

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<sup>110</sup> Bavarian Military Archives in Munich, Officer File 35348.

## AFTERWARD

### The Germanness of the German Jew

I have been struggling for years in deciding how to organize the volumes in my library. I have a collection of books that clearly belong under “German history” and another collection that clearly belong under “Jewish history.” However, I have not been able to decide how to place books that recount the history of the Jews in Germany. To place them under “German history” would seem to rip them out of the continuities of Jewish history. But to place them under “Jewish history” would seem to deny their rightful place as an ethnic subgroup history within the wider narrative of German history. “These are the very areas,” wrote Walter Benjamin, “in which any order is a balancing act of extreme precariousness.” I have been living with the disorder for years, so that, for me, the disorder itself has become a part of my understanding of the subject. “For what else is this collection” wrote Benjamin about the general challenge of library cataloguing, “but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as an order?” However, historians are more than mere collectors of books. Our task is to make order out of the chaos, to establish a pattern. Like the librarian, we recognize that “if there is a counterpart to the confusion of a library, it is the order of the catalogue.”<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental question for me has been the *Germanness* of the German Jew. Rather than a Jew in Germany struggling to achieve integration and fight off antisemitism, he or she was a Jew who was a German. Integration and antisemitism were

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 60.

both aspects that affected the German Jew, but not always existentially. Persecution is more about the persecutor than the persecuted.<sup>2</sup>

I have been haunted and moved since I heard Paul Mendes-Flohr explain in a lecture he gave when I was an undergraduate how

Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873-1956), the noble shepherd of German Jewry during its last tragic hours...introduced a small but ever so momentous change in his morning routine. It was his wont each morning after prayers to read a page from the Talmud, then a passage from a Greek play in the original Greek. As the dark clouds of the Third Reich gathered, he changed his routine. He now read from the Hebrew prophets and then from the German classics—Kant, Goethe, and Schiller.<sup>3</sup>

Baeck's study of German philosophy and poetry, even as he was sent to Theresienstadt, was meant to protest that no one could deny him his *Germanness*. On the contrary, he was a true German and would preserve his culture amidst the barbarian Nazis.

The *Germanness* of the German Jew is evident in the story of German Jewish soldiers in the First World War. Wars have the potential to both create and destroy nations. The United States, for example, came together as a nation in the Revolutionary War, and became a superpower through the world wars of the twentieth century. The German Empire was established after the Franco-Prussian War, only to start to fall apart

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Troy Paddock's articulation: "The dissection and analysis of an image or stereotype illuminates the creator of a stereotype more than the person or thing that is characterized." Troy R.E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, the Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890-1914* (Boulder, Colorado: Camden House, 2010), p. 7.

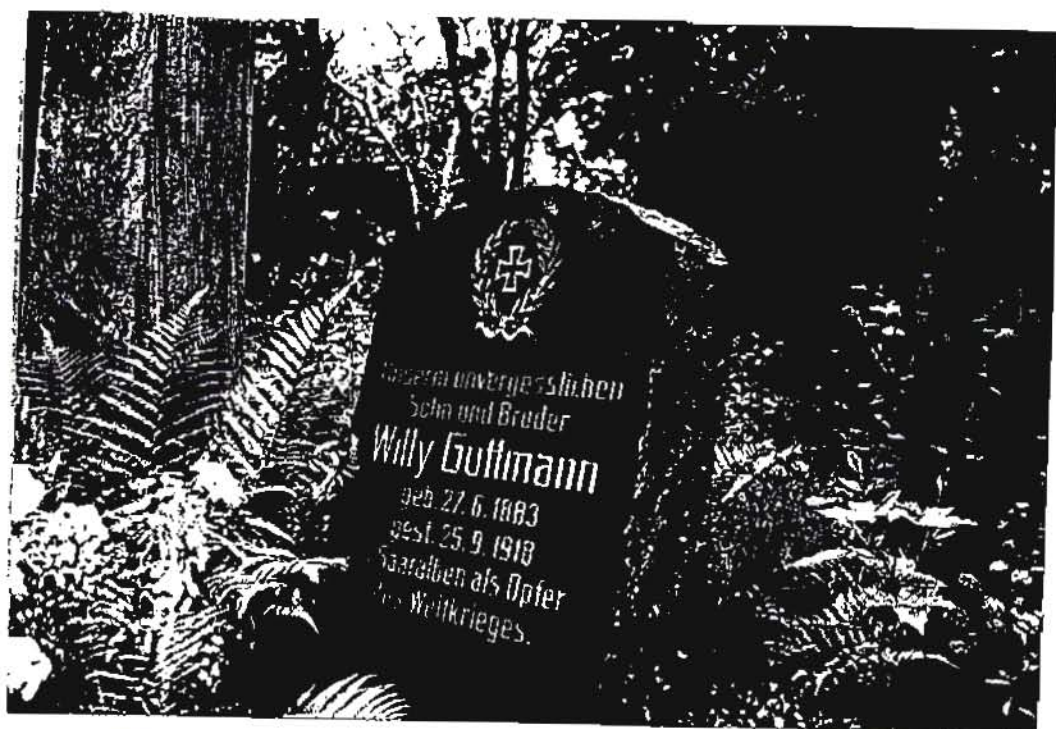
<sup>3</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 44.

after World War I and meet its destruction in World War II. That which has the power to destroy has the potential to build and form. Peoples come together in the national effort of a war. Ethnicities and competing identities are tested as they cooperate in the greater cause.

The German Jews who fought for Germany in World War I found, through their experience at the front, an identity with each other and with Germany. Their experience was a uniquely Jewish experience. They celebrated Christmas, but not as Christians. They found great meaning in the celebration of Jewish festivals. They recognized a common patrimony with the Jews of Eastern European lands, but a distant one. Their German identity was not mitigated by experiences of antisemitism. Theirs was a world, after all, of various prejudices. Overall, they integrated in the army. They knew they were Jewish, but they were no less German than any of their comrades-in-arms.

**APPENDIX:**  
**ILLUSTRATIONS**

Figure 1



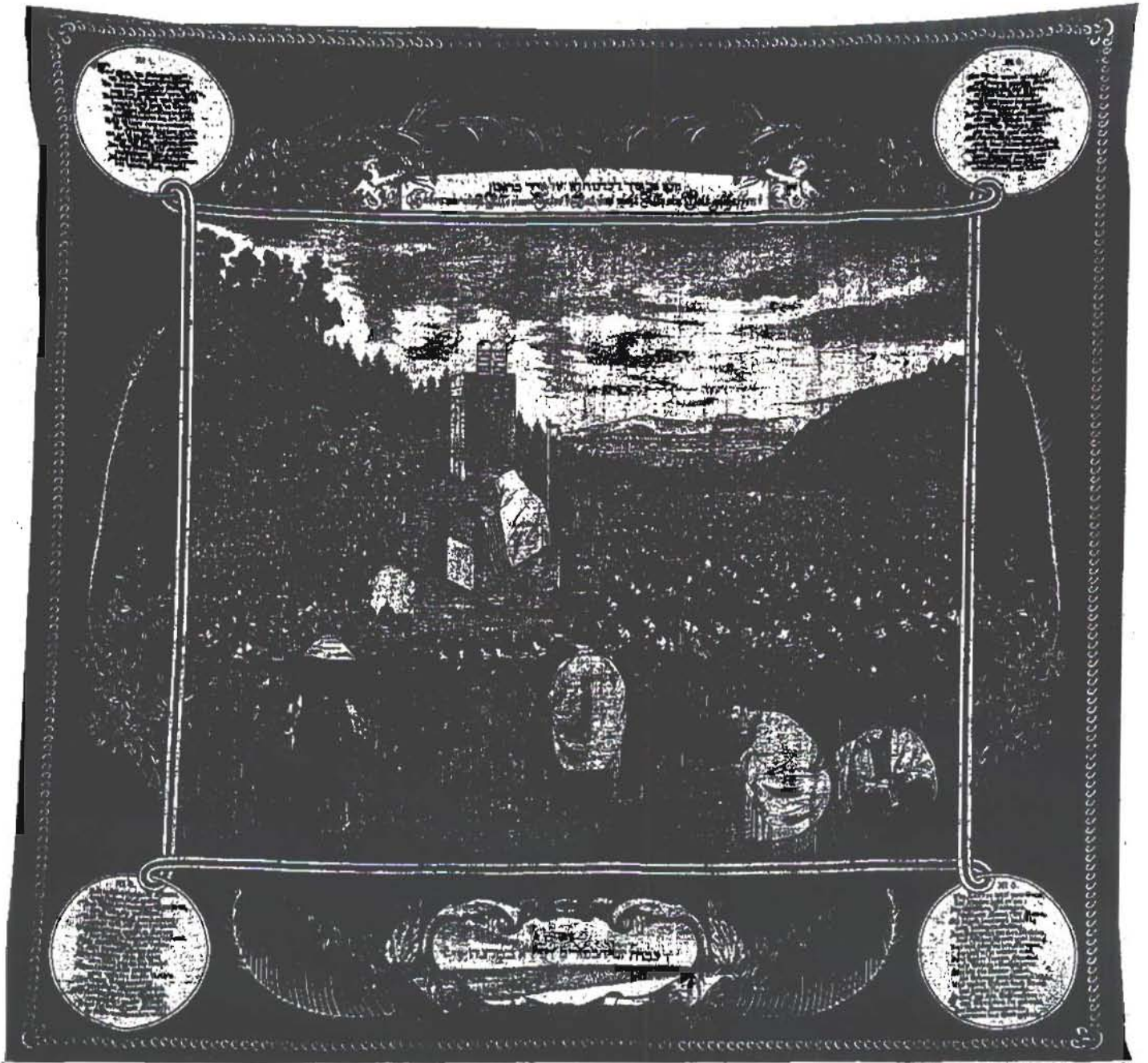
A tombstone at the Jewish cemetery in Breslau (now Wrocław) showing the Iron Cross as the distinguishing symbol. (Photograph by D. Fine.)

Figure 2



SOURCE: Burkhard Asmuss, ed., *Holocaust: Der Nationsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2002), p. 71, plate 2/4a.

Figure 3



SOURCE: Nachum T. Gidal, *Die Juden in Deutschland von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik* (Köln: Könemann, 1997), jacket cover illustration.

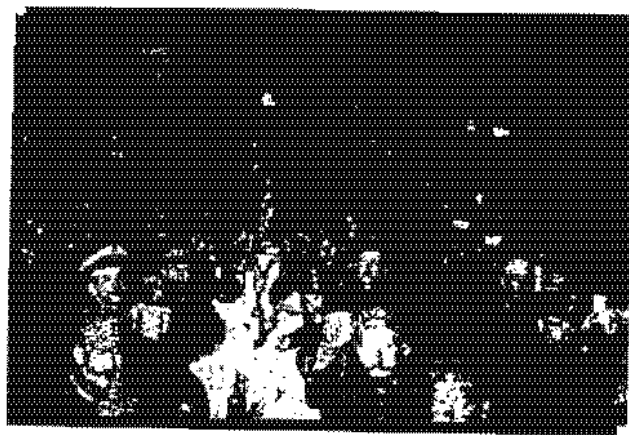
Figure 4



Yom Kippur service for soldiers in the German army, Brussels, 1915. LBI Photo Collection .

SOURCE: *Fighting for the Fatherland*. Leo Baeck Institute exhibition catalogue, cover

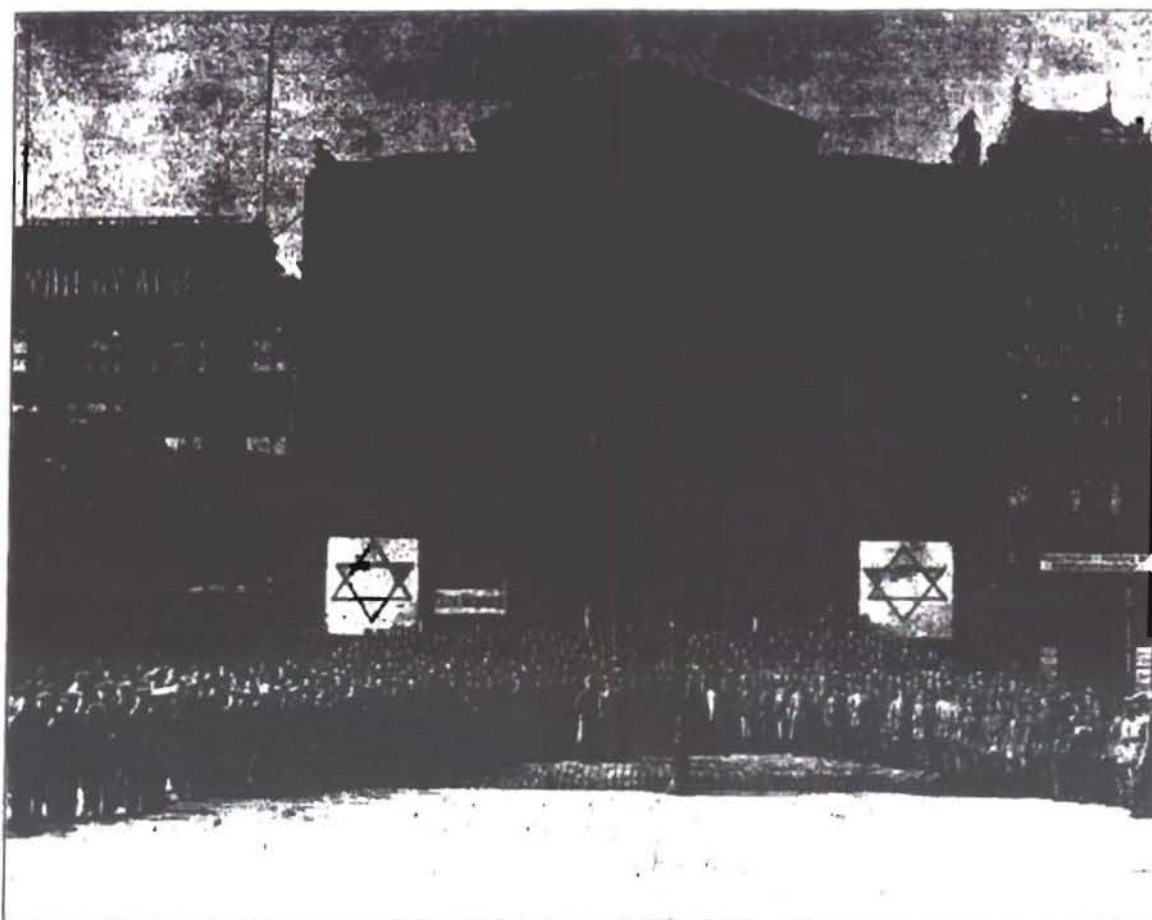
Figure 5



*A Passover seder held for Jewish soldiers at the front, 1916. LBI Photo Collection.*

SOURCE: *Fighting for the Fatherland*. Leo Baeck Institute exhibition catalogue, p. 13.

Figure 6



Nach der Festandacht an der Synagoge.

SOURCE: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 10 November 1916, p. 536.

Figure 7



**Konfessionelle Verbrüderung im Felde.**  
Von links nach rechts: Rabbiner, Pfarrer und Pastor des  
s. Russen-Oberkommandos im Osten.

SOURCE: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 11 June 1915, p. 279.

Figure 8



SOURCE: Uriel Birnbaum, "In Gottes Krieg," *In Gottes Krieg: Sonette* (Vienna and Berlin, 1921), p. 5.

Figure 9



SOURCE: Birbaum, "Kriegsausbruch," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 7.

Figure 10

Der Krieg und Europa  
*Karikatur des italienischen Zeichners Petrella*



SOURCE: Vittorio Petrella, "Der Krieg und Europa," in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte der Ersten Weltkrieges*, p. 17.

Figure 11



Das Gespenst des Krieges  
Zeichnung von Georg Kretzschmar

SOURCE: Georg Kretzschmar. "Das Gespenst des Krieges," in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 11.

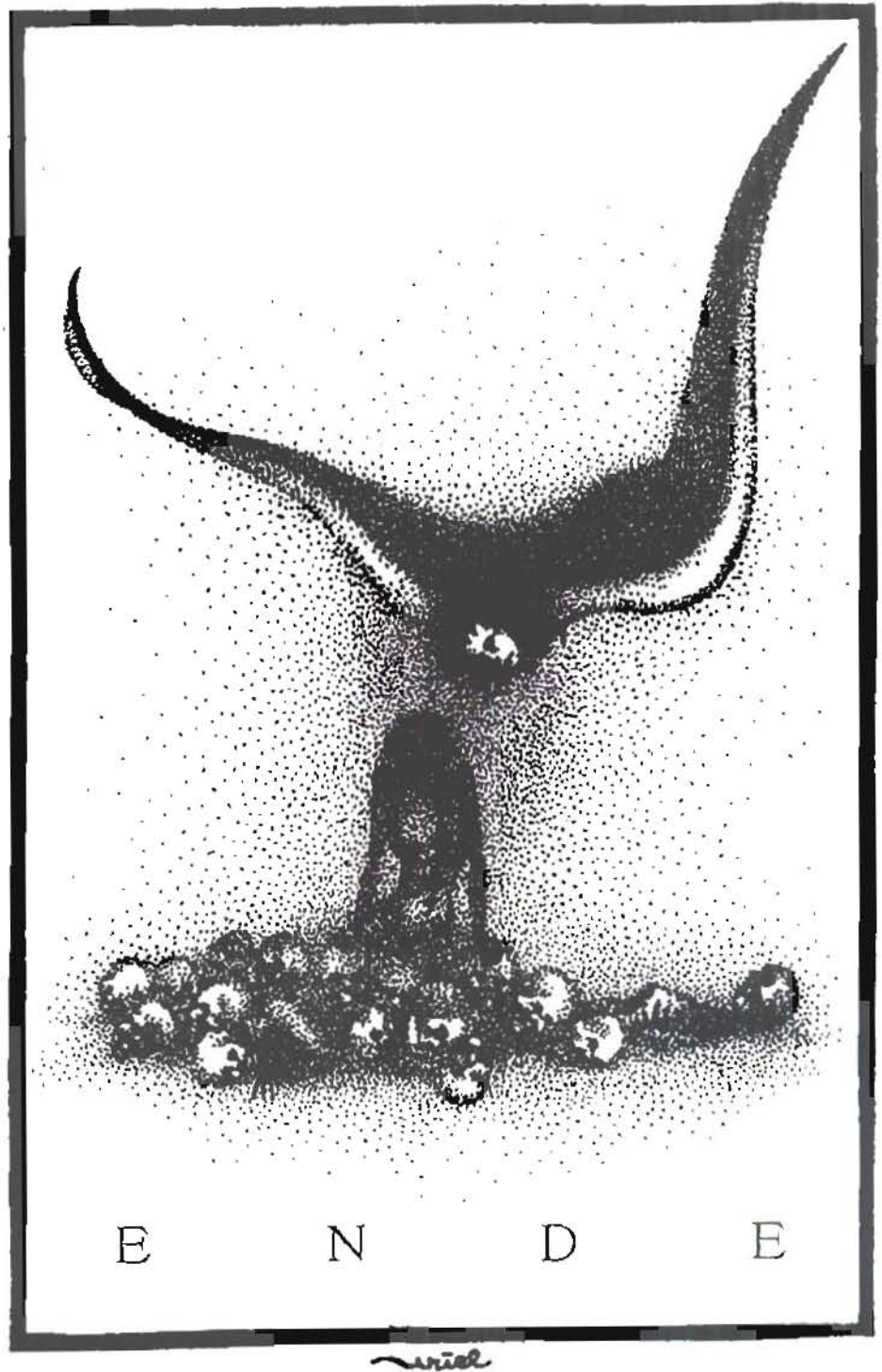
Figure 12



Der Tod bläst die Friedensschalmei  
*Lithographie von Honoré Daumier*

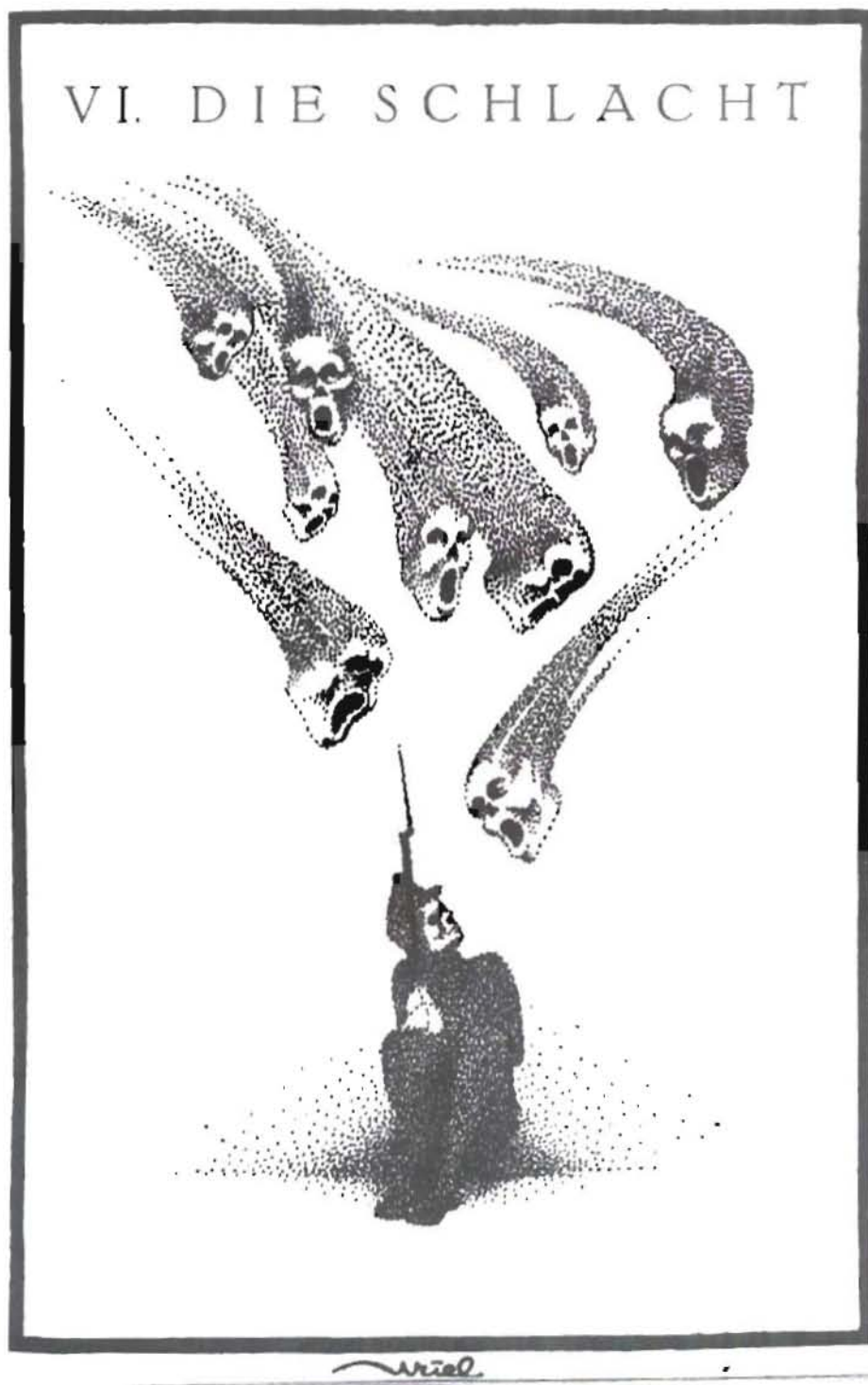
SOURCE: Honoré Daumier, "Der Tod bläst die Friedensschalmei." in Hirschfeld and Gaspar. *Sittengeschichte*, p. 592.

Figure 13



SOURCE: Birbaum, "Ende," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 267.

Figure 14



SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Die Schlacht," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 151.

Figure 15

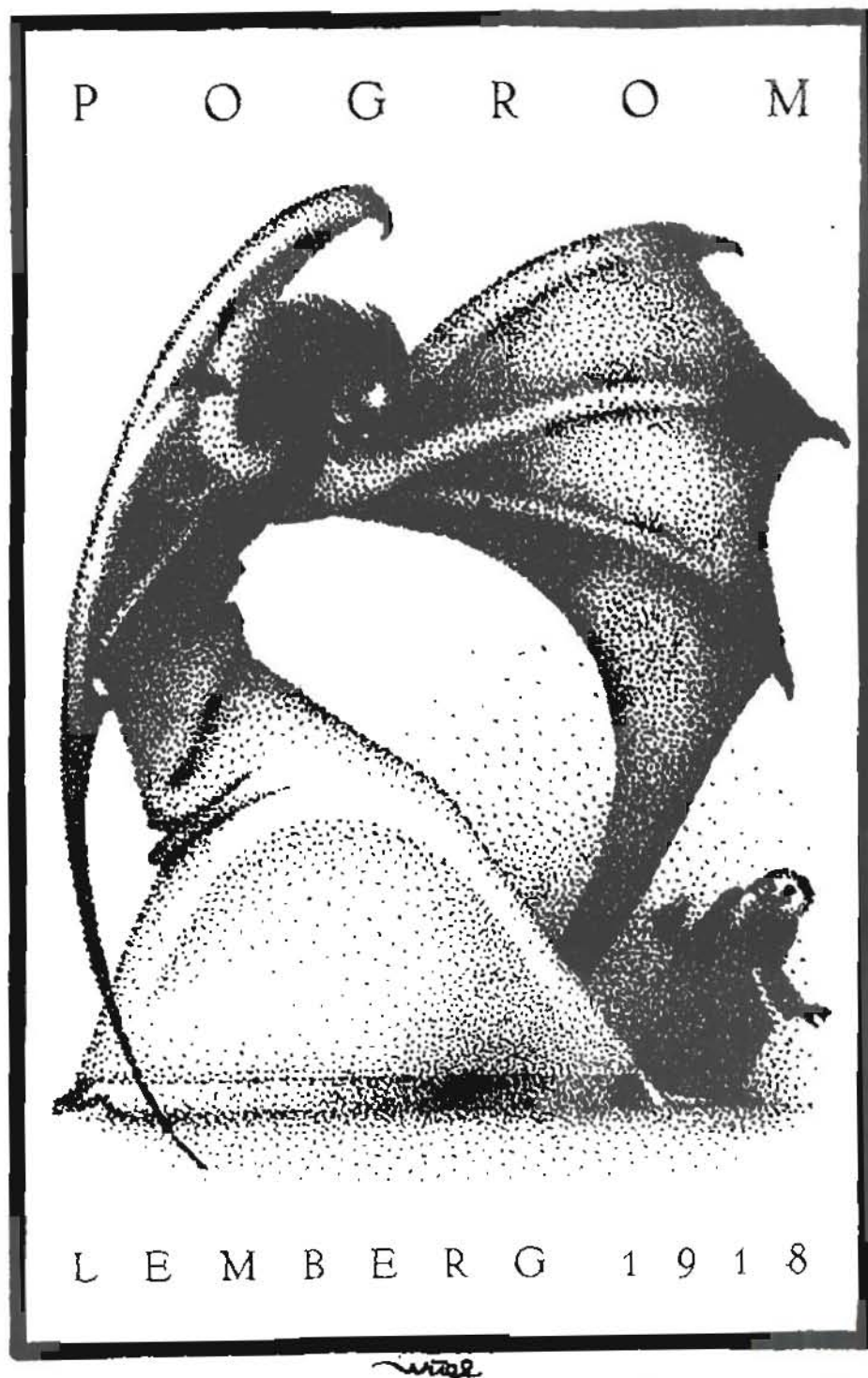


*Das ist kein Traum . . .*

*Die Gefallenen sind dafür gefallen, daß ein verabsicherungswürdiger Krieg nicht von neuem beginnt*  
*Holzschnitt von Frans Masereel*

SOURCE: Frans Masereel, "Das ist kein Traum," in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 602.

Figure 16



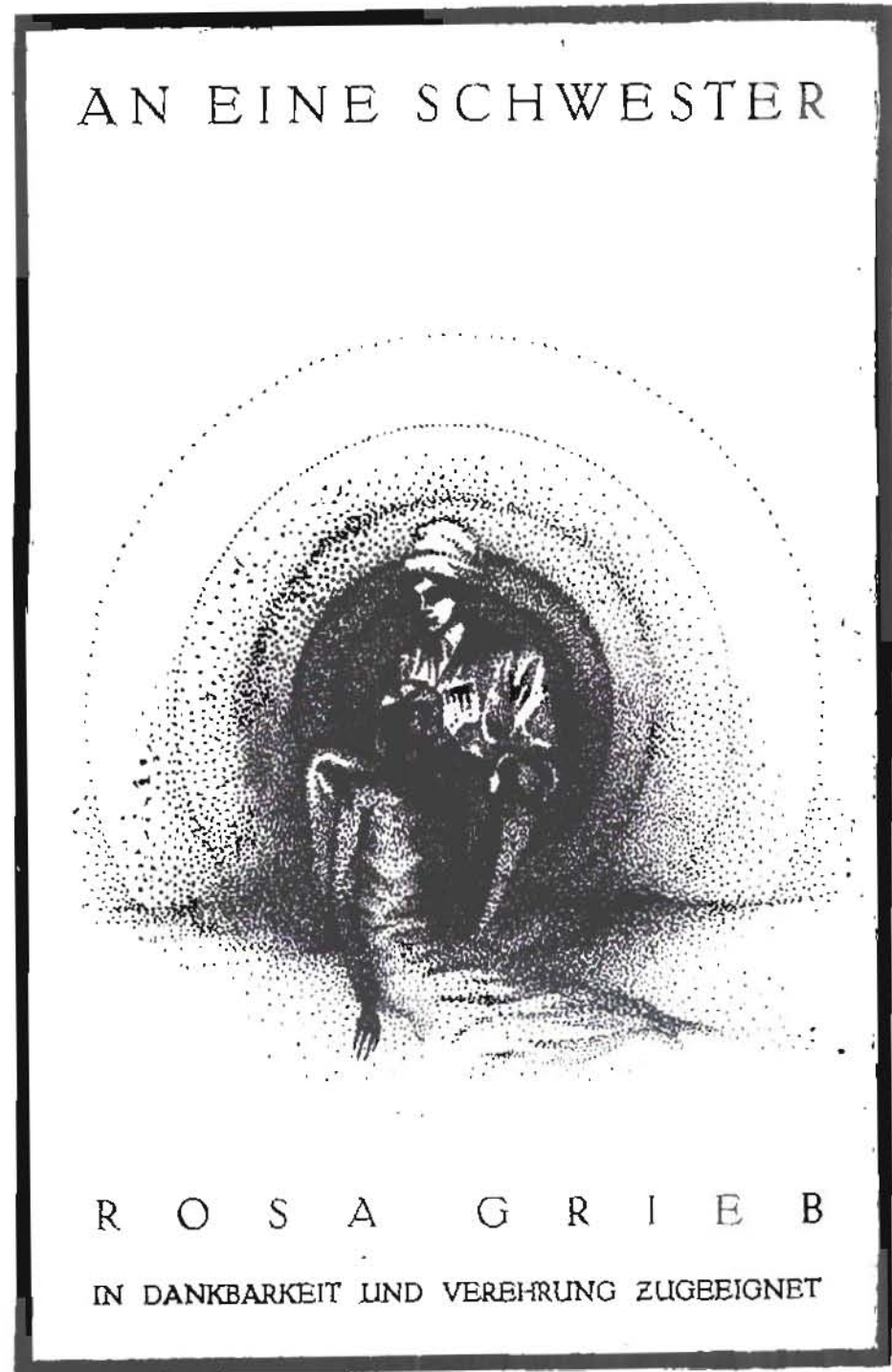
SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Pogrom: Lemberg 1918," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 253.

Figure 17



SOURCE: Gordon M. Forsyth, "Der Triumph des Hasses." in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 553.

Figure 18



SOURCE: Birnbaum, "An Eine Schwester," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 205.

Figure 19



SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Kranke Schwester," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 233.

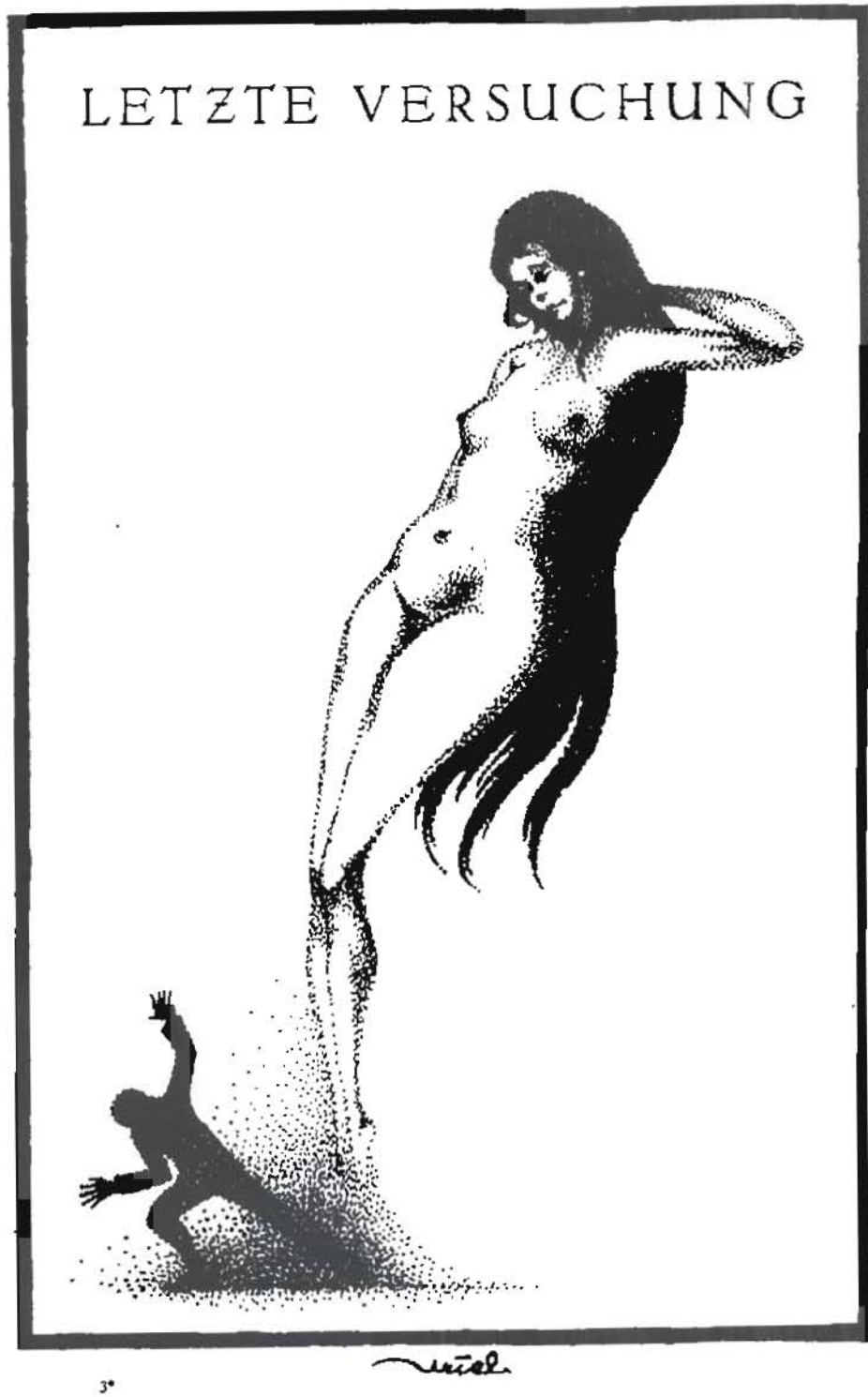
Figure 20



Engel oder Dirne?  
*Wandkritzelei in einem Wiener Reservospital*

SOURCE: "Engel oder Dirne?" in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 138.

Figure 21



SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Letzte Versuchung," *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 37.

Figure 22



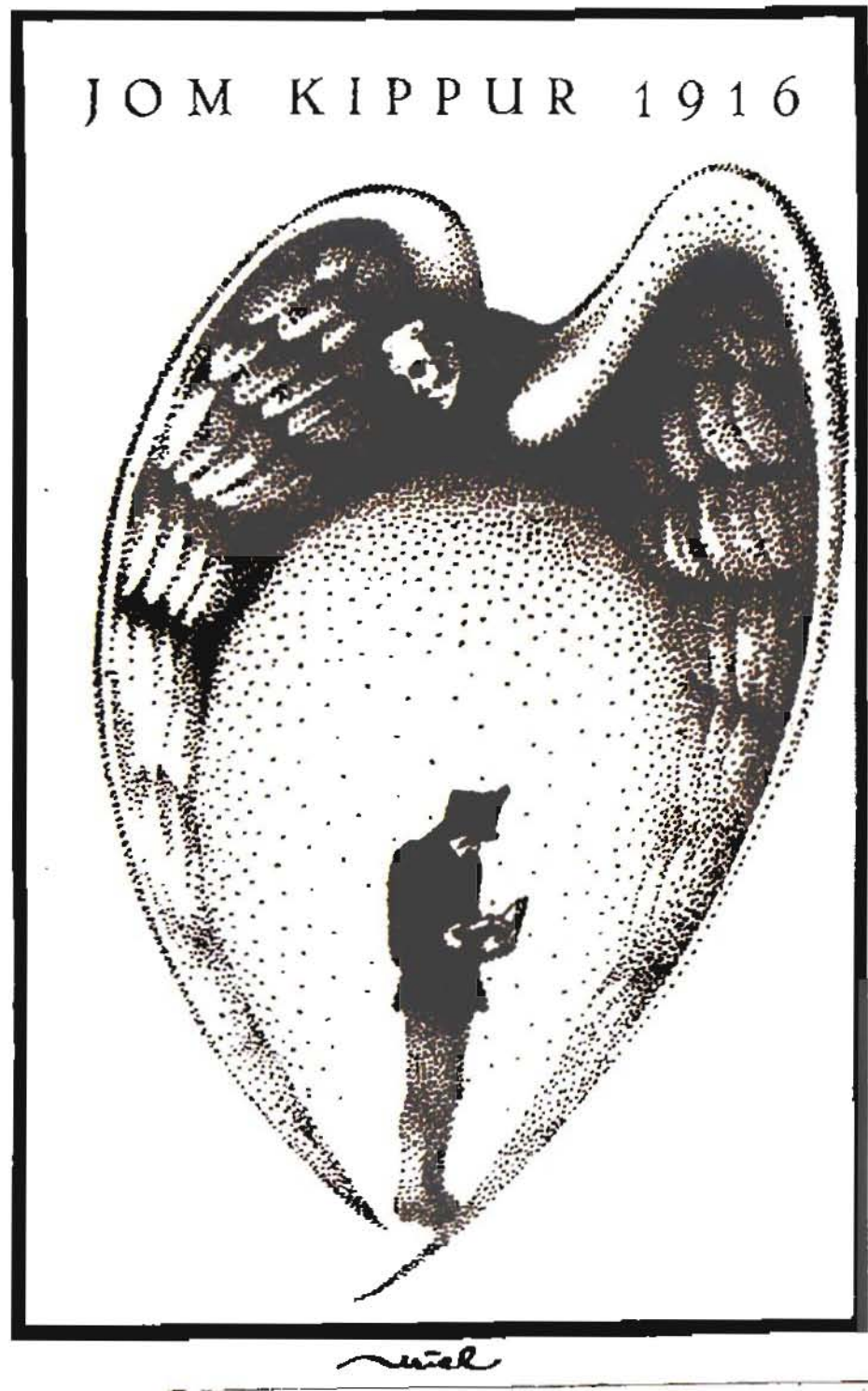
SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Die Verwundung." *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 167.

Figure 23



SOURCE: "Der Traum der Soldaten," in Hirschfeld and Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte*, p. 155.

Figure 24



SOURCE: Birnbaum, "Jom Kippur 1916." *In Gottes Krieg*, p. 107.

Figure 25



SOURCE: Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Hanau: Komet, 1929), p. 270.

Figure 26



Fig. 4. Prostitutes shielding their faces. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York)

SOURCE: Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 92.

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