

**Harriet Pass Freidenreich. *Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women. (The Modern Jewish Experience.)* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2002.**

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Inspired by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, historian Harriet Pass Freidenreich set out to discover exemplary emancipated Jewish women in her grandmother's generation. While Woolf could only speculate about the life of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, Freidenreich has located the real struggles and triumphs of women in Martin Heidegger's generation, the most famous of whom include political theorist Hannah Arendt, social worker Alice Salomon (the "German Jane Addams"), and feminist lawyer Margarete Berent. In *Female, Jewish, and Educated*, the author draws judiciously from published autobiographies, memoirs, letters, interviews, and questionnaires to return a voice to two generations of pioneering women. Drawing on a database of 460 women who were born during the fin de siècle or after 1900, Freidenreich investigates the importance of gender and religion to women's educational, professional, and personal experiences. This current research builds on Freidenreich's expertise in Jewish social history, bringing readers again into the world of Central European Jews before the Second World War. [1]

At the outset, Freidenreich wondered: "whether or not attending university helped to emancipate women from traditional gender roles and social expectations" (p. xv). She found that education was indeed part of a constellation of factors that made a profound difference in women's attitudes and choices. Although these "modern" Jewish women participated in the cultural apparition known as the *femme nouvelle* or *Bubikopf*, they departed from their non-Jewish contemporaries with their high rates of university matriculation and "overrepresentation" in the professions. [2] Indeed, before 1933, 25 percent of all German female physicians were Jewish, and two out of five of all university appointments by women were held by Jewish women. Educated Jewish women in Germany and Austria gravitated towards medicine, the social sciences, the physical sciences, and engineering. Religious qualifications, usually in the form of baptism certificates, restrained the interest in teaching, civil service, and the legal professions.

To explain Jewish women's commitment to formal learning and their eagerness to pursue traditionally masculine occupations, Freidenreich looked to the values and behaviors of their families. She found that these women were generally raised in assimilated, middle-class, urban households, where their fathers were professionally employed and their mothers were cultured housewives. Families also tended to be small. Pediatrician Margaret Schoenberger Mahler emulated her father but at the expense of a comfortable feminine identity: "It was to my father's world, the world of the intellect, of science, of medicine, that I turned to in early childhood. In contrast to my mother, who would not even let me enter her inner sanctum, the kitchen, my father treated me as if I were his son. ... In fact, it was my father's eager adoption of me as his 'son,' and my willing acceptance of this role, that confounded my childhood gender identity" (p. 31). These descriptions of family patterns are certainly interesting and the author lays the

## *Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women*

groundwork for an analysis of gender and class that might have been usefully pursued through an engagement with feminist theory, and sociological models of the reproduction of elites.

Although organized religion held little importance for the majority of these women, Freidenreich provides persuasive evidence that being born Jewish shaped these women's lives. The author characterizes 60 percent of her subjects as "Just Jews," meaning those who "were located on the middle rungs of the Jewish consciousness ladder, accepted their Jewishness as a fact of life, even though this aspect of their personal identity did not always play an important role in their lives before the advent of Nazism" (p. 141). Hannah Arendt, for instance, identified as Jewish ethnically but not religiously. Women's friendships with other Jewish intellectuals in adulthood seemed to substitute for the religious rituals that typified their childhoods.

The relative absence of religious observance did not alter the fact that these women suffered discrimination both as women and as Jews. Freidenreich argues effectively that prior to the Great War, misogyny was more powerful than antisemitism, making women's pursuit of higher education and careers difficult but not impossible. This book is replete with anecdotes of the prejudice and harassment faced by women as students, in academic jobs, as professionals, or as "double earners" once married. Even if a doctoral candidate could find a professor willing to supervise her Ph.D., she might find herself discouraged by the assignment of an unchallenging and unpromising research project (p. 62). The fortunate women who secured university appointments as researchers or professors could not expect to receive a salary, or a promotion (p. 75-79). With the increase of antisemitism during the interwar period, however, Jewish men and women experienced painful episodes of persecution, violence, and social exclusion.

After the Nazis rose to power in 1933 and promulgated discriminatory laws, these educated women became acutely aware of their Jewishness as they lost their jobs, their individual freedoms, and were forced to decide whether to flee the country. The two most poignant, if brief, chapters address women's "interrupted lives" and their effort to regain some normalcy after emigration. Those who reached safety in the U.S., Britain, or Palestine were generally confronted simultaneously by sexism, xenophobia, and antisemitism. Women trained in medicine had the most success reestablishing themselves such that four fifths of émigré physicians in the U.S. were reaccredited by 1950 (p. 187). Those wishing to read more about the émigré experience might consult *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*. [3]

Politics is one of the intriguing issues introduced in a chapter on "personal identity and political involvement." Freidenreich shows that Jewish educated women were aligned with the left-wing, often participated in family planning campaigns, and advocated women's rights but were reluctant to join feminist organizations. One finds prominent, if few, Jewish leaders among the largest European and international women's rights organizations, and yet the history of antisemitism in this context is, as yet, little explored. [4] These interesting phenomenon deserve further analysis, and it might begin to explain why Freidenreich did not find much solidarity between Jewish and non-Jewish women.

The foremothers profiled in *Female, Jewish, and Educated* grappled with a myriad of challenges with perseverance and courage. This is a timely book as professional women today are still troubled by discrimination, and the tension between work, marriage, and childcare. One hopes that this valuable study, with its emphasis on religion, gender, education, and the professions will encourage further research in comparative women's history.

*Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women*

[1]. *Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); *Jewish Politics in Vienna, 1918-1938* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.) Freidenreich also contributed the historical afterword to the Dutch Jewish physician and family planning advocate Aletta H. Jacobs's *Memories: My Life as an International Leader in Health, Suffrage, and Peace* (New York: Feminist Press, 1996).

[2]. On the "new woman" in European contexts see Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Birgitte Sjøland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[3]. Sibylle Quack, ed., *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period* (New York: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[4]. On European feminism, see Gisela Bock, *Women in European History*, trans. Allison Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, eds., *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

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