

Beller, Steven: Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: A Cultural History.

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, 269 S., Tafeln.

In this thought-provoking book, Steven Beller has traced the history of the Jews of Vienna from the Enlightenment to the 1890s in order to assess their role in the cultural and intellectual ferment of Vienna between the 1900s and the 1930s. As a corrective to the assumption of Carl Schorske¹ that the Jews can be subsumed in the bourgeoisie at large, Beller has attempted to clarify the question of Jewish influence *in* and *on* Viennese culture.

This volume is divided into two parts. In the first, the author attempts by means of a statistical survey on the effect of the assimilation of the Jews on the personal composition of Viennas's cultural élite to answer the question: in terms of numbers, how Jewish was Schorske's *fin-de-siècle*? Beller defines Jews in broad terms of descent,

¹ Carl E. Schorske: *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York 1980.

rather than narrowly by religion: the presence of a Jewish past in a family was apt to mean a considerably different world view than someone not of Jewish descent. He examines the Jewish presence in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna in various cultural fields including art, music, psychology, philosophy, and theatre, concluding that there was a large, sometimes preponderant, Jewish presence in many of them. Beller then moves to the question of whether the liberal educated class, the audience of this culture, was similarly Jewish. Based on his statistical sampling of every fifth class from nine of the eleven *Gymnasien* in central Vienna between 1870 and 1910, the author has concluded that the Viennese cultural élite tended to be made up of Jews among other Jews.

In the second half of the volume, Beller approaches the question of the Jewish element in turn-of-the-century Viennese culture. He has attempted to develop a conceptual framework for examining the cultural and social context of Vienna through the eyes of the assimilated Viennese Jews who comprised so large a part of the cultural élite.

The Jews entered into the mainstream of society as a result of the Enlightenment; due to assimilation, they moved from the shtetl to the "garden of high culture." Beller asserts that those Jewish families who were to form part of the Viennese cultural élite having decided to assimilate, did so through German rather than Austrian culture. German as the culture of assimilated Jews meant that where these Jews were, so too was German culture, even where there were almost no Germans. Here, Beller cites the example of Jewish schools in the Bohemia. Further, Jewish votes in the Bohemian Crownlands—German anti-Semitism aside—helped the Germans maintain a sizeable portion of political representation there.

Beller has used the work of individual members of the cultural élite to illustrate the enormous Jewish presence in Viennese culture at the turn of the century, a presence that he asserts was neither accidental nor incidental to the character and result of that culture. Nor, according to the author, was it accidental that most of the major figures of the culture were Jewish, because it was they, for the most part, who comprised the liberal, bourgeois, educated classes in Vienna.

The author has employed an impressive array of primary sources including interviews, school records, letters, memoirs, and newspapers to tell his fascinating story. In addition, his bibliography of secondary materials is extremely useful. In short, this book is a must for those interested in Habsburg and Jewish history in general or Vienna 1900 in particular.