

**“THE JEW’S FACE GRINS EVERYWHERE BUT IN
THE TRENCHES!”**

Emancipation and Jewish soldiers in World War I
Germany

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**„Wo so viele Helden bluten,
drücken sich jetzt nur die Juden.
Überall grinst ihr Gesicht,
nur im Schützengraben nicht.“¹**

**(“Where so many heroes bleed,
only the Jews now shirk.
Her face grins everywhere,
but in the trenches.”)**

- Refrain of an anti-Semitic poem circulating many German newspapers in 1918.

¹ Rosenthal, Jacob. “*Die Ehre des jüdischen Soldaten.*”: *Die Judenzählung im Ersten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen.* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007,), 106.

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Introduction

Since the 18th Century, the subject of Jews in a military situation has been debated. Long before the creation of the state of Israel, the topic of Jews in the military occupied even such enlightened scholars as Moses Mendelssohn and Christian W. Dohm. Some saw their religious commitments (such as observing the Shabbat and keeping kosher) as too great to overcome, even in a wartime situation. Were they patriotic enough to serve in battle, or were they, as some suggested, a nation within a nation? Also, because Jews had traditionally been exempt from military service, it was questioned whether they were even capable of military service for lack of experience. The reaction of Jews to this new obligation tended to vary according to how traditionally Jews lived in certain areas; Jews who were better integrated into non-Jewish society often welcomed military service (as a sort of last obstacle to overcome in full assimilation,) whereas Jews in more traditional areas tended to oppose it.

It is important here to note the differences the conscription had in Europe: in most parts of Western Europe, where assimilation seemed to be a major motivating factor for many Jews, conscription was viewed in a positive light, as a final hurdle in the push toward emancipation; in Eastern and Central Europe, many traditional communities still existed, preserving their values and wishing to continue on their non-military oriented tradition. In some areas of the Habsburg Empire, for example, Jewish communities were permitted to pay a fee in exchange for sparing one of their Jews from military service (an option which many Jews, especially in more traditional areas, chose to exercise). It is important to note also that the majority of traditional, Orthodox Jews lived in the Russian Empire, where conscription had a radically different meaning than in Western Europe. This was not only because the Jews living in that

area tended to be more traditional, but because in Russia, military was viewed by both sides as a sort of punishment.

Probably one of the most well-known cases dealing with the loyalty (or perceived *disloyalty*) of Jewish soldiers was the Dreyfus affair of the late 19th century. Shocking to Jews and non-Jewish alike, these events were often seen as a “turning point” (in retrospect) in the lives of such prominent Zionists as Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau, proof in the “failure of assimilation.” If a country as liberal as France – where Jews could strive for high military positions, such as that of Captain Dreyfus – could be the stage for such blatant anti-Semitism, what hope was there for other countries which were less liberal to start with? For many Jews who turned to Zionism, they found their motivation on the battlefield; the inability of the surrounding society to respond to their efforts in a desirable manner led many to consider the possibility of a new homeland.

The roles that Jews played in the military was not just debated during the time of the First World War, but are also a topic of debate at present. While some sources claim that Jews were overrepresented on the front (ie. faced real battle,) some sources claim that they actually tended to be placed in the rear, both by choice as well as by necessity; it was much easier to fulfill dietary laws and observe the Sabbath in less combative positions. Published reports of Jewish service during the First World War support the fact that Jews were found in disproportionate numbers on the front. In fact, some scholars claim that “the number of Jews among the intellectual war zealots was disproportionately high.”² This can be attributed to a few factors: first, Jews felt a personal connection to the war against the Russian Empire (as

² Elon, Amos. *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch 1743-1933*. (New York: Picador, 2002,) p. 320.

mentioned above); second, that Jews (in the German military) flocked to volunteer for the military. For many Jews, volunteering for military duty was the final step in integration into German society; by making the ultimate sacrifice, it was hoped that Germany and its non-Jewish population would finally accept them as equal citizens. For others, military service was a duty that they felt obligated to fulfill, if not for the purpose of assimilation and acceptance, then simply out of pride. This one can see in the fact that, regardless their ideology and religiosity, at the outbreak of war, all newspapers (Jewish or non-Jewish) supported the war and called to arms all of their eligible public. War was the time when ideological differences and old prejudices were put aside for the sake of the *Vaterland*; the idea of *Burgfrieden* (or civil truce) was not merely a theory, it became practice in the first years of the war. “As always in a time of great enthusiasm, one forgot, for a little while at least, all prejudices.”³ For some Jews, the act of joining the military was a symbolic one, proof of their loyalty and soldierly ability (and therein countering some anti-Semitic stereotypes).

However, for those German Jews intent on integrating into German society (without giving up their Jewish identity,) the First World War was nothing if not the ultimate proving ground for their worthiness to be part of the German nation. All wars were seen as a battle not only for the state but for Jewishness as well: “You comrades and at the same time confreres of our faith, this duty must be doubly great, twice as holy, this call that you are now following must enliven you with twice as much strength. Your courage, your volition will be healed by the feeling of thankfulness. The moment has now come, where you pay with your blood, thank with your lives...”⁴ The words of 19th Century politician and judge, Gabriel Riesser

³ Berger, 35.

⁴ Ibid, 37 quoting from a flyer from 1813.

continued to hold true for the First World War: “There is only one baptism that can initiate one into a nationality, and that is the baptism of blood in the common struggle for a fatherland and for freedom. ‘*Your blood was mixed with ours on the battlefield.*’” (emphasis added)⁵

Yet regardless of the initial motivation, the time eventually came when old prejudices were once again revealed. As the tides of war began to change and Germans realized they were witnessing a war more brutal than they had bargained for, and that they no longer had the upper hand, the search for a scapegoat ensued, and the old anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jewish disloyalty (or, rather, loyalty to other Jews rather than to Germany) lent itself as an easy solution. In 1916, the *Juden zählung* (or Jewish census) was carried out by the High Command of the German military to determine whether Jews really were carrying their weight in the military, or merely sitting in the rear, observing. The official reason for the census was, of course, much more politically correct (officially, the census was carried out to *disprove* anti-Semitic accusations of Jews not fulfilling their military obligations). The results, however, were never released (independent studies after the war showed that Jews fought in disproportionately *large* numbers on the frontlines); the fact that the census was taking place at all was no secret, and the anti-Semitic press drew its own conclusions. Elsewhere during the war, rumors were circulating in neighboring Austro-Hungary suggesting that Jewish soldiers had a tendency to self-harm or feign illness in order to be exempted from duty; a measure that was seen as something “typically Jewish”⁶ by much of the general population outside the military. Despite evidence to the contrary, Jews in the German military were still perceived by many anti-Semites (and ordinary Germans) as having

⁵ *Paulus-Riesser Debate, The.* In *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 144-6.

⁶ Schmidl, Erwin A. *Juden in der k. (u.) k. Armee 1788-1918.* (Eisenstadt: Studia Judaica Austriaca, 1989).

negligibly contributed to the war effort; even today, claims the president of the Central Consistory of Jews in Germany, and the Jewish Communities in Munich and Upper Bavaria, Charlotte Knobloch, it is unknown and unbelievable to many people that Jews fought and fell for Germany in the First World War.⁷

For German Jews, the First World War had another important function, aside from proving themselves and their abilities to Germans and anti-Semites; the war served as a potential medium through which German Jews could find a new identity. Did they necessarily have to choose between being German and being Jewish, or was it possible to be both? The role of the military in forging this new identity was especially important; as it was relatively recent that Jews were permitted to serve in the military (less than a century with some exceptions,) it was up to soldiers to prove that Jews were no longer a helpless minority, and hopefully show that they were worthy of social emancipation, and of bearing the title of “German.” “We are not immigrants; we are native born. And, since that is the case, we have no claim to a home someplace else. *We are either German or we are homeless.*”(emphasis added)⁸

What is Germanness? What is Jewishness?

Some of the greatest problems facing a study of Jews in the German military involve the definitions of Germanness and Jewishness. While seemingly simple, the term “German” is often used in a cultural sense rather than in politically. Theodor Herzl, Franz Kafka, and Albert Einstein are often called German, although having spent the large part of their lives

⁷ Charlotte Knobloch in the greeting of Berger’s *Eisernes Kreuz und Davistern*, pp.13-14.

⁸ *Paulus-Riesser Debate, The*. In *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 144-6.

outside of Germany (Herzl and Kafka also having been born outside of Germany's boundaries). Before 1914, German culture had spread beyond its geographic borders; German contributions to science and the values ensuing from this reliance on natural law were common also in many other parts of Europe.

Definitions of Jewishness are more complicated than the definition of Germanness.

Conversion, intermarriage and a reluctance to declare one's confession blurred the lines between Jew and non-Jew. During course of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, rates of intermarriage and conversion continued to rise such that some lamented that German Jewry would cease to exist by 1950.⁹ Indeed, the percentage of Jews represented in the population fell from 1.3 percent to 0.89 percent between 1880 and 1910.¹⁰ Even in relatively mono-cultural cities such as Breslau (in comparison with cities such as Berlin,) rates of intermarriage increased from 11% in 1890 to 52% during the First World War.¹¹ The reason for this increase in intermarriage and conversion seems to lie in the adoption of a new religion in place of Judaism: *Bildung*. Bildung, coupled with the strong desire for assimilation, left little room for religious piety. It is no coincidence that the reform movement of Judaism appeared first in the German lands. For those aspiring to higher positions and better careers, Judaism was something often left by the wayside: "...religion now had little more significance than articles of clothing; you chose what to wear according

⁹ Elon, 225. Dr. Felix Theilhaber claimed in 1911, that due to intermarriage and sinking birthrates ("the result of modern women's uppityness") by 1950, German Jewry would no longer exist.

¹⁰ Ibid, 249.

¹¹ Ibid, 225.

to the customs of the time and place.”¹² At times, it was even joked that “Baptism...was much too Jewish.”¹³

Definition of who was “Jewish” depended as much on an external definition as an internal one. Although converted Jews could, in most cases, hold jobs normally reserved for non-Jews (even progressing into the officer corps of the military,) they still battled against anti-Semitism, admittedly to a much lesser degree.¹⁴ Especially during the period when racial anti-Semitism was first finding its footing, conversion was becoming less acceptable as a means of shedding one’s Jewishness (in the years to come, Hitler’s definition of who was Jewish stands out as the primary example of an external definition of Jewishness). In the words of Theodor Herzl, “the majority may decide which are the strangers; for this, as indeed every point which arises in the relations between nations, is a question of might.”¹⁵

The Heterogeneity of German Jews

By defining any group in terms of their group identity, one necessarily ignores all of the subdivisions within that group. This is especially true when defining a group according to their race, religion and nationality, and definitely true when describing German Jews. This thesis will, in large part, describe “the German Jews” as if they were one homogeneous

¹² Ibid, 230.

¹³ Ibid, 231.

¹⁴ Berger, Michael. *Elser's Kreuz und Davidstern: Die Geschichte Jüdischer Soldaten in Deutschen Armeen*. (Trafo Verlag: Berlin, 2006,) p. 137. Berger describes how many Jews aspiring to become officers found it relatively easier to enter at least the officer reserves after conversion. However, even these converted Jews were often treated worse than non-Jewish officers, simply for their Jewish heritage.

¹⁵ Elon, 285.

group, however, the group could not have been more heterogeneous; from Reform Jews to the Orthodox, from Zionists to assimilationists¹⁶ (with, of course, further divisions within each of these groups,) German Jews encompassed a vast array of religiosity and ideology. The reactions of some groups (the Zionists, for example) expressed in the press will be examined in comparison with those of others in order to better highlight the divisions within the group of “German Jews.” That said, actions like the *Judenzählung* and other challenges in integration and acceptance into society were directed at and affected all Jews in Germany, regardless of their particular beliefs.

¹⁶ I use assimilationist to mean those reform Jews keen on entering into German society and achieving full equality and social emancipation without having to give up their religion through conversion.

Chapter 1: Jews in Germany Prior to 1914

It seems all too easy to claim that, in retrospect, German Jews should have known of their fate in the Second World War long before. Certainly, by focusing one's attention on anti-Semitic literature, and perhaps the few prophetic warnings by some Jews long before anti-Semitism reached its peak in the Weimar period (Walther Rathenau, in 1915, warned that "the hate will double and triple,"¹⁷) it is easy to trace the downfall of Germany's Jews in retrospect, however, it seems that for most Jews, before the First World War, anti-Semitism was either a myth, or merely imagined. Walter Rathenau's cousin, Willy Ritter Liebermann von Wahlendorf, even claimed that anti-Semitism existed "mostly in the exaggerated fantasy of Jews."¹⁸

It has been claimed by some historians that German anti-Semitism can be traced back to the medieval times as a special breed of Jew hatred, specific to Germany. Daniel Goldhagen, for example, claims that the Holocaust could only have happened in Germany because of this particular strain of anti-Semitism. However, while acts of anti-Semitism might have been more numerous and more real than Willy Ritter Liebermann would have admitted, put into the context of fin de siècle Europe, German Jews were well ahead of their relatives in France and Austro-Hungary (and, it goes without saying, than those Jews in Russia) in terms of assimilation. Although, for example, in Bavaria, a bill granting full equality to Bavarian Jews

¹⁷ Berger, 172.

¹⁸ Elon, 244.

met with passionate resistance from Bavarian communities,¹⁹ it can at the same time be said that the Bavarian army was the only one in Germany which allowed for Jews to enter the officer track.²⁰

Contrary to this myth that eliminationist anti-Semitism can be traced back to before the war, it appears that even outside of Germany, anti-Semitism in Germany was not seen as particularly threatening, especially in comparison with the anti-Semitism in France and in Eastern Europe. German diplomat in Washington, Graf Bernstoff, claimed, in 1914, that “until now, the Jews in Germany have not had it bad. They have had the opportunity to develop their economical and intellectual strengths and to become a great factor in Germany’s life. Due to their energy and talents in all areas of economic and spiritual life, they have had great accomplishments and achieved strong positions.”²¹

Still, the existence of anti-Semitic clubs and political parties should not be ignored. The Pan German League and the Christian Social Party (in both Germany and Austria) certainly reflected the prejudices of a certain part of society, yet for most individual German Jews, their effects were negligible – at least to the extent that they were able to retain the hope of eventual assimilation. The majority of German Jews continued to believe that by showing unwavering loyalty to Germany, especially in its time of need, they would be rewarded equality.

¹⁹ Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. (Vintage Books: New York, 1997,) p. 61. Goldhagen states that five to six times more Germans opposed Jewish emancipation than favored it. This bill was also passed in 1849, long before the start of the First World War.

²⁰ Berger, 137.

²¹ Ibid, 133.

1.1 Jews in the Military Prior to 1914

In the first half of the 19th century, for Jews in Germany, military service was an obligation bestowed upon them only in time of need. During the wars of liberation against Napoleon's army from 1813-1815, Jewish volunteers were accepted and Jewish men were eventually conscripted into the Prussian military. Although the emancipation of Jews under king Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1912 (pushed on him from above) was revoked three years later (with the withdrawal of French troops,) Jews continued to be permitted to serve in the military. Later, in 1817, this right was restricted to "citizens," a category into which not all Prussian Jews fit.²² Those Jews who were able and willing to serve in the military faced further restrictions; becoming an officer was out of the question. Still, time after time, in war after war (from the wars of liberation to the Austro-Prussian war to the Franco-Prussian war) Jews served in numbers which were at least equivalent to the proportion of non-Jews serving.²³ Despite lacking a long history of military tradition and despite the obstacles they faced having chosen such a career, Jews were intent on defending Germany in its time of need.

²² Ibid, 71.

²³ Ibid, 102.

1.2 The *Ostjuden* Factor

It seems worth mentioning the effect that the so-called *Ostjude* (Eastern European Jew) had on German Jewry. The extent to which the *Ostjude* influenced the assimilation efforts of German Jews (and the extent to which they may have unwittingly been responsible for the rise of anti-Semitism in German society) is debatable however seems important to look at when examining the history of German Jewry. The coinciding rise in anti-Semitism with the westward migration of Jews from Eastern Europe (and the sudden surge of post-war anti-Semitism after many German soldiers had contact with *Ostjuden* on the Eastern front) is often given a causal relationship, with anti-Semitism being the result of the presence of the *Ostjuden*; “an assimilationist strategy would have been successful had it not been for the continuing intrusions from the East.”²⁴

Because of Germany’s geographical location, it served a sort of buffer area between the traditional *Ostjuden* and the well-integrated (and at times idolized²⁵) Sephardic Jewish population. “While the geographical dimension was absent in other West European countries, German Jews were never able to forget that they shared a common border with the unemancipated Eastern ghetto masses.”²⁶ Many Jews fleeing Eastern Europe ended up in Germany, either permanently (often being used for forced labor²⁷) or in transit en route to America. This put German Jews in an uncomfortable position. They, too, came from the ghetto (either directly or a few generations back) and were struggling to forge their own

²⁴ Aschheim, 61.

²⁵ Ibid., 27. Aschheim describes the sort of “family romance” of German Jews, seeing themselves as descendants of Spanish Jewry rather than of *Ostjuden*

²⁶ Ibid, 5.

²⁷ Alon, 312.

“German” identity entirely removed from the ghetto. *Ostjuden* were blamed for the rise in anti-Semitism, their very presence the source of *Judenhass*, or Jew-hatred: “the ‘flood’ of Betteljuden [begging Jews] was doing nothing less than rekindling the old flames of Jew-hatred, and to make matters worse, all Jews were being held accountable.”²⁸ Their presence supposedly led credence to common stereotypes surrounding Jews; namely, that they were dirty, poor, and lacking in morals (by practicing such “occupations” as begging and prostitution). Also, the language of the *Ostjuden*, Yiddish, was so similar to German that it could be understood, and was, as a result, often seen as a sort of bastardized German, or *mauscheln*. For German Jews attempting assimilation, these similarities, as well as the constant reminder of their past (which they were desperate to shed) may have hindered their progress in integrating into German society. For as much as they tried to downplay their Jewishness, they still felt a responsibility to assist Jewish refugees from the East (“with German thoroughness and Jewish heart”²⁹).

The experiences of the First World War were for some, eye-opening when dealing with the *Ostjude*. The direct contact between Germans, German-Jews and *Ostjuden* during the war could not help but influence opinions about the *Ostjude*. For some Germans, this contact with ghetto Jews led to a newfound appreciation for traditional, “genuine” Jewish culture (being able to attend Yiddish theatre performances and understand the plot,³⁰) while for others, anti-Semitic feelings were strengthened (the types of *Ostjuden* that soldiers often came into contact with were usually the poorest and most downtrodden of society; because of Jewish poverty in areas of Eastern Europe, and the mutual understandability between German

²⁸ Aschheim, 21.

²⁹ Elon, 272.

³⁰ Aschheim, 150.

and Yiddish, Jewish women provided the bulk of prostitution sought after by German soldiers³¹). The fact that contact with the *Ostjuden* was not a rare occurrence often left German Jews in an awkward position; as German historian Steven Aschheim has argued, “The war placed German Jews directly in the middle: they were poised between the Jews of the Eastern ghettos and the German authorities. As patriots they had to confront the *Ostjuden* within a German political perspective; as Jews they had to act as champions and mediators of the *Ostjuden* in their encounters with the German authorities.”³² Expressionist poet, Erich Mühsam, described his identity as “my Germanness and my Jewishness...are like two brothers equally loved by the same mother...I delight in their intimate closeness.”³³

Despite the controversial influence of the *Ostjuden* on German Jewry and its attempts at assimilation, the mere presence of the unassimilated, “raw,” Jew of the Eastern ghetto did bring the issues of Jewish integration into the forefront, at least for some. While some saw these Jews for what they were (impoverished Jews coming from very traditional settlements in Eastern Europe,) others saw them as representative of all Jews. Their uncleanness, “immoral” lifestyles and physical degeneracy were attributed to all Jews. Put another way, “the *Ostjudenfrage* became the *Westjudenfrage*.”³⁴ Regardless their actual impact on assimilationist efforts, the *Ostjude*, as a stereotype (and to a limited extent, as a physical presence in Germany) can serve as a telling example of the complexities of and difficulties facing German Jewry in the years leading up to the First World War.

³¹ Ibid., 148.

³² Aschheim, 142.

³³ Elon, 347.

³⁴ Aschheim, 176.

1.3 The German-Jewish Love Affair

There seem to have been certain elements in German society especially attractive to Jews, both inside and outside Germany. It has been documented that Yiddish-speaking Jews in Eastern Europe (especially in neighboring Poland) not only welcomed the Germans as liberators³⁵ but also tried to claim a special bond to Germany and German culture through language. The linguistic similarities between German and the language of eastern European Jewry, Yiddish, were now emphasized, and Yiddish was proclaimed not as a primitive form of *mauscheln* but rather as a symbol of Jewish loyalty to Germany.³⁶ Even after emigrating, German Jews didn't seem to lose their connection with the *Vaterland*. Giving their children German names, remaining involved in affairs of the German *Volk* (such as financing the erection of a statue of Heine's *Lorelei* in New York,) it seems that German Jews – more so than Jews from any other country – kept their Germanness alive.³⁷ Even Jews who had emigrated to Palestine returned at the start of the First World War to volunteer for military service “out of love for the land of our birth.”³⁸

In the early years of the war, an extremely high German patriotism can be found in German Jewish newspapers, regardless their ideology or religiosity. However, while such propagandist calls to arms were found in almost all newspapers of the time, there is something about the emotions used in Jewish literature – at the start of, and during the war –

³⁵ Elon, 253.

³⁶ Aschheim, 158.

³⁷ Elon, 252.

³⁸ Pulzer, Peter. *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1814-1833*. (Wayne State University Press, 2003,) p. 195.

which suggest a deeper affection for the country. The works of assimilationist Jews are the most striking: “Without Germany’s fame and greatness, a real German Jew cannot exist and breathe at all.”³⁹ Even near the end of the war, there can be found a strong desire for Germany’s victory: “May individuals, may thousands fall, Germany will live, Germany must live! Amen!”⁴⁰ For German Jews, Germany was not merely a host country; it was their *Heimat*.

³⁹ Berger, 176. Quoting Counselor of Justice, Maximilian Horwitz.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 141. This quote is taken from the “Jewish spiritual welfare on the western Front” („*Juedische Seelsorge an der Westfront*“) published in 1918.

Chapter 2: The New Man

What is a perfect man? How does he move, what does he believe in, and most importantly, what does he look like? Beginning in the 19th century, the manly ideal was redefined, and made to encompass not only certain physical traits but was to become the embodiment of bourgeois society's most prized virtues: health, chivalry, stoicism and bravery amongst others along the same lines. This was the new ideal, and the image that the First World War helped solidify in its ideals of correct military conduct and the proper behavior of a soldier. This “perfect” man transcended political and ideological boundaries and was at the forefront of the call for the reformation of society, be it from fascists, socialists or Zionists.

2.1 The New Jew

For no other people was this creation of a “new man” more revolutionary than for the Jews. Often stereotyped as a “People of the Book,” they were not just merely altering the image they held of a perfect male, but radically changing the masculine ideal that had for centuries dominated Jewish society, and had been taken as the representative for the Jewish man, the scholarly Jew. A warrior-like image was unavailable to Jews; having been stripped of their right to bear arms during the Middle Ages, they became dependent on their rulers for protection, and were therefore given the stereotype of the decrepit old man, physically unfit and unable to defend himself.

Because this creation of the “new man” came around the time of Jewish emancipation in continental Europe, the “new Jew” had certain qualities which were characteristic of him, and a reformation of the body carried much deeper meaning than for the non-Jew. Sports, gymnastics, the creation of the *Muskeljude*, were imbued with a hint of Jewishness, and the goals these activities sought to achieve differed from those of the secular “new man”.

In early modern eastern Europe, the ideal Jewish male, the Rabbi or talmudic student, was indeed characterized by qualities that made him very different from, in fact almost the exact opposite of, the ‘knight in shining armour’ heartthrob of our romantic culture. The East European Jewish ideal of a gentle, timid and studious male – *Edelkayt* – moreover, does have origins that are very deeply rooted in traditional Jewish culture...⁴¹

This *Edelkayt*, supposedly so valued amongst East European Jews, created a stereotypical Jewish man who contradicted so much from the masculine ideal which was becoming so important in non-Jewish society. The passive Jewish man which came to be the representative image of male Jews, is claimed by some scholars to have his roots in rabbinic culture. This scholar, seen as unattractive or even effeminate by non-Jewish contemporary as well as modern cultures, was, for these Jews, neither seen as “unmanly” nor unattractive; his power and masculinity was to be found in his knowledge. However, because of this submissive physical appearance, Jewish men held to their intellectual dominance very tightly; because Jewish men did not consider themselves physically superior to women, some scholars suggest that they sought control (which the surrounding non-Jewish males gained through physical dominance) through their scholarship.⁴²

⁴¹ Boyarin, 1.

⁴² Ibid, 143.

Although the gendered hierarchy may have been comparable to that of the non-Jewish populations, the physically unfit scholar (or his descendents) became less and less popular in non-Jewish as well as Jewish society. The 19th Century, in its quest for the “new man” sought a man who was the whole package: who was not only learned and wise, but physically cultivated as well. In fact, both mental and physical fitness were so tightly entwined that they became inseparable, such that it was believed that without one, the other could not exist: “...a rotten body cannot be beautified even by the most radiant spirit.”⁴³ There was a balance that was required for health, for beauty, which the “new man” was supposed to represent. The “new man” encompassed society’s virtues in all that he did; “The hero must be all of one cloth: his courage should manifest itself in the words he utters, in his opinions no less than in his posture and facial expression...The hero thus focuses and incorporates all the factors that constitute the ideal of masculinity.”⁴⁴

The new man, encapsulating the typical values of the time, drew his inspiration from the traditional sources that might be expected. His strict moral values were extracted from the bourgeois value system, as was the all-important balance of mind and body. This was the time of *Körperkultur*, the mergence of the body with culture. The body ideal that was ascribed to the new man was that of the traditional Greek statue; nicely proportioned and a gleaming image of physical perfection with a face made of stone. His moral qualities were extracted from the knightly tradition: he was disciplined and stoic, yet dedicated and loyal to his nation.

⁴³ Mosse, George L. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996,) 32.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 52.

Interestingly, although these “manly” traits were so treasured, they were thought to be formed not through education or training, but in physical exercise and gymnastics. The balance of body and mind was taken as a given (capacity in one – usually physical – was equated to the capability in the second – mental) and it was accepted that by training the body, one would be training the mind in morals and generally “manliness.”⁴⁵ “Once make him a man in vigor, and he will soon become a man in understanding.”⁴⁶ Mental and physical health were seen as so significantly bound that it was understood that one could not exist without the other. Without physical fitness, morality was impossible; the physically fit man could be nothing other than morally ideal (this was the time of criminology and phrenology, where image was everything). “Manly beauty was a sign of moral worth. Moral health and mental robustness...are more often than not the consequences of bodily strength.”⁴⁷

Therefore, it is around this time (the 19th Century and continuing into the beginning of the 20th) that sports and gymnastics clubs flourished in Europe, that the military aligned itself with the movement, and added gymnastics to its military training. In non-Jewish society (including the military, in which there were, of course, some Jewish participants,) gymnastics trumped team sports for two very important reasons: first, gymnastics was believed to involve much more will-power and self-control than sports, which was seen as being too erratic to be beneficial to one’s mind; second, gymnastics encouraged unity rather than competition.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 44. Gymnastics according to such important figures as Guts Muth and Turnvater Jahn was very different than the definition of gymnastics today. The military’s initial adoption of gymnastics meant war games, and role playing scenarios. For others, gymnastics included the disciplines today associated with gymnastics but also swimming, dancing, skating and the martial arts.

Not only the military required such teamwork and solidarity, but patriotism did as well.⁴⁹ In the creation of modern nationalism, it was important that each citizen feel as part of a whole, and to create an ideal, a role model for the others to aspire to.

Among Jews, however, although gymnastics was seen as the ideal for perfecting the physique, team sports played a very important role precisely because of their competitiveness. At a time when Jews were fighting for their emancipation, sports became another arena for this struggle; “Competition in sports was not viewed as a neutral zone...‘every fight that our team wearing the Mogen David wins against our opponent is a fight for the Jewish club, and every time it is then somehow a Jewish matter.’”⁵⁰ It is interesting to notice, however, that on the one hand, while gymnastics may have been seen as a vehicle of assimilation (by Jews entering the same clubs as non-Jews,) on the other, it was also used as a tool of asserting their own strength and distinguishing themselves from non-Jewish society.

The appeal of the *Muskeljude* extended from Zionist to Bundist, each adapting the symbol of the strong, powerful man to represent a strong nation (of course, the idea of a “nation” different considerably between the two groups). “While the Zionists spoke of a ‘muscular Jew’ with his broad chest, powerful limbs, and valiant gaze, the physical ideal that Bundist workers had in mind in their sports was that of a supple-limbed steeled, powerfully built worker who, just like the bourgeois Jew, should become more self-confident and free of any

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Brenner, Michael and Reuveni, Gideon, ed. *Emancipation Through Muscles: Jews and Sports in Europe*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006,) 51. In the essay by Gideon Reuveni, “Sports and the Militarization of Jewish Society.”

sense of subservience with the help of sports.⁵¹” Although Zionists and Bundists had their sights set on different end goals, both were seeking to make a change in society and within Jewry and both sought an answer in the physical area and came up with the almost identical ideal.

For both Zionists and Bundists, however, and in contrast to non-Jewish society, the new man played a very important role in the struggle for equality. While the new man in non-Jewish society represented an equality amongst all citizens, and symbolically represented the strength of the nation over other nations, for no other people was the new man so revolutionary, and so important. Since the late eighteenth century, there had been a call to “reform” European Jewry. Ideas that Jews were a degenerate race were commonly accepted, and it seemed at time that the only issue up for debate was whether or not Jews as a group were “reform-able” (until the late nineteenth century and the dawn of modern, racial anti-Semitism, it seemed to follow that once converted, individual Jews were automatically reformed). Their ability to interact and form lasting bonds with non-Jews was questioned, their racial composition and their physical stature were constantly being criticized, at one point prompting haskalah leader Moses Mendelssohn to defend the abilities of Jews in the military by stating that unless individual Jews were tall enough to fight in the military, they would be useless unless defending fellow Jews or “hostile pygmies.”⁵²

Mendelssohn was of course not the only one to mention the physical hindrances of Jews in society (he was replying to another article written by Johann Michaelis in his “hostile

⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

⁵² Dohm, Michaelis and Moses Mendelssohn all discuss the potential of Jews in the military due to their height. In *Remarks Concerning Michaelis’ Response to Dohm* in 1783 (found in *The Jew in the Modern World*, p. 48,) Mendelssohn states that “it is obvious that they will have to be of the proper height...unless they are merely to be used against hostile pygmies and fellow Jews.”

pygmies” piece). A few years later, in 1789 (when much French literature was dedicated to the question of whether or not Jews should be given equal rights following from revolutionary ideals,) Abbe Gregoire wrote his essay, “On the Physical, Moral and Political Reformation of the Jews.” Some have argued that it has significance that the “Physical” is the first of the reforms listed, but more importantly is that all three are called for; not because Jews supposedly lacked in all three areas, but because they were all linked. Without physical regeneration (which in his view lay in a change in dietary, hygienic and breeding habits,) moral and political reformation could not proceed.

The fact that the ideal *man* was so emphasized (as opposed to the woman) is important to note for several reasons. Most nationalisms are gendered, and it is the image of the man which tended to stand at the forefront in the nineteenth century. Zionism, Jewish nationalism, was no exception, and just as Jews wanted a state “like all other nations,”⁵³ they chose a man like all other man; gone was Jewish *Edelkayt* and welcomed was the *Muskeljude*. Like the new man elsewhere, he was favored as the national symbol and embodiment of society’s most valuable virtues as the “stronger” sex; while the women of the nation were supposed to provide the support and background for the nation, the men were the ones protecting the nation.⁵⁴ Here one can draw an important connection: the nineteenth century marked the spread of popular sports, amongst civilians, and within the military. Competitions mocked battle (for those in the military, gymnastics consisted of role-playing war games) and the explosion of popularity of sport, heightened by growing emphasis on appearance (for example, as an indicator of criminality) helped forge another important link between society and the military. Militarism was seeping into society, and eventually, more

⁵³ Laqueur, Walter. *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*. (New York: Schocken, 2003,) quoting Jabotinsky.

⁵⁴ Mosse, *The Image of Man*.

and more things became symbolic of war. “For most European nationalisms, the image of a new man...did entail the praise of force, a soldierly ideal, a fighting spirit directed against internal and external enemies.”⁵⁵ Put another way, “...sports was a medium that militarized Jewish society.”⁵⁶

The fact that the new Jew was male is also important to note, especially in comparison with the perception of Jewish men before the creation of the new man. As described earlier, the traditional pre-emancipation Jewish man was the opposite of what became the symbol for Jewish nationalism. A scholar, he found his strength in his intellect, and knowledge of the Torah, rather than in his body. Even Nordau noted this aspect in “Jewry of Muscle,” too, admitting (at the same time as calling for a physical regeneration of Jewish men) that “...unlike most other peoples, we do not conceive of [physical] life as our highest possession...”⁵⁷ However, the position of Jews in pre-emancipatory times was a submissive and passive one, and one which Zionists sought to reverse. Because of the social position of Jews, as well as the popular image of the traditional Jewish male, *Galut* (exile) was given the gender of female (naturally, a group opposed to this system would choose a symbol representing the other sex). Sometimes described as impotent, other times as homosexual, exile was at times seen as not only being weak, but being abnormal. Zionism, then, in its quest for normalcy (“like all other nations”) sought to raise the position of Jews by turning its men into “normal” men. “Diaspora is essentially queer, and an end to Diaspora would be the equivalent of becoming straight.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Mosse, George L. *Max Nordau, Liberalism and the New Jew*. 571

⁵⁶ Brenner, 56 in the essay by Reuveni.

⁵⁷ Nordau, Max. “Jewry of Muscle.” *The Jew in the Modern World*, 547-548

⁵⁸ Biale, David. *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. (New York: Basic Books, 1992,) 229.

2.2 *The New Man and the First World War*

The creation of the new man reflected the creation of a potent national symbol, for Jews and non-Jews alike. He was to possess all of bourgeois society's values in the body of a classical Greek statue. He became the hero of the modern nation, and through his virtues, was to represent the power of the nation. For Jews especially, this new man was important, for he above all was the embodiment of pride and dignity. The physical transformation of Jews (individually and metaphorically, as a group) was to transform Jews from subordinate citizens of their representative host countries into proud workers (be they serving a Jewish or a communist state). Thus, the transformation of the new Jew was more drastic than the transformation of the new man for non-Jewish society. Whereas non-Jewish society drew upon traditional images of beauty and perfection, Jews were adopting a symbol with no roots in recent Jewish history (examples from biblical times were often used as symbols of Jewish strength). *Edelkayt* was abandoned for the new man, studying the Torah replaced with gymnastics, and the suppression of the ghetto gave way to the expression of national pride.

The First World War, seen as an arena for Jews to prove themselves to German society, was also the ideal place for Jews to display their New Jew. Strong and courageous, he was to earn the respect of all Germans by fighting for his nation, bravely sacrificing his life for the life of the nation. Showcasing the "New Jew" in the arena of a major war (although, granted, just how major the war would become was at the time unknown) and displaying all of the virtues the new ideal man was supposed to embody was seen as an enormous step in the right direction for assimilationists; together, it was hoped, the New Jew and the New non-Jew would make the New German. For non-assimilationists and Zionists, the New Jew presented a new image of Jewry to not only Germany, but to the world, of a reformed, courageous Jew

who was no longer hiding powerlessly behind the state rulers, and who was capable of combating against other full-sized men, not just “hostile pygmies

Chapter 3: Jewish Soldiers in Other Armies

3.1 Emancipation and Conscription

It is important when studying emancipation of any minority to look at both political and social emancipation; political referring to the point in time when the minority becomes “officially” equal (at least on paper,) and social emancipation referring to when the majority population finally accepts the minority as equal. In the case of European Jews, these dates varied depending on which country they lived in at the time (those Jews living in German areas conquered by Napoleon were granted emancipation under him, but when his armies retreated, so did his promise of equality). In some cases, the process was relatively quick (as in France, where political and social emancipation seemed to go hand in hand) whereas in others (such as Germany,) the process was long and somewhat convoluted. The time at which Jews were allowed into the military again varied with each state and came at differing times in the emancipation of its Jews.

The simplest model to look at when examining Jewish emancipation in Europe is the French model; in this case, both political and social (in theory) emancipation were granted at once (or within a few years) and as part of this newfound equality, Jews were therefore expected to do their military duty as every other Frenchman. In Austria-Hungary, Jews were required to participate in the military, and even serve as conscripts, almost an entire century before they were granted political emancipation. In Russia, Jews faced forced conscription as a sort of punishment; a way through which they could correct their “crooked” ways long before any sort of emancipation was underway. And in Germany, the situation was that the participation

of Jews in the military was still reluctantly accepted, even after Jews had been given political emancipation. Social emancipation remained out of reach. So perhaps it was the time line? Perhaps if Jews had been allowed into the military only after a certain degree of social emancipation had been achieved, things might have been different?

For Jews in Western Europe, scepticisms about how capable Jews could be as soldiers were those which Jewish soldiers were fighting against. Jewish soldiers of the French, German and Austro-Hungarian (for the most part⁵⁹) armies yearned for equality amongst the ranks, regardless of their religious confession. In France and Austro-Hungary,⁶⁰ it was possible for Jews to reach high ranks in the military, and while several found success in military careers (some French Jews had made it a family occupation, passed down from generation to generation,⁶¹) their “Jewishness” never seemed to disappear; their name was always associated with “Jew.”

Jews in the Russian Empire were however facing much different issues than those in Western Europe. In Western Europe, in light of the French Revolution and the general emancipation of Jews, admission into the military had very different implications than in Russia. While for assimilationist Jews in Western Europe military service was perceived as a positive action (by both Jews and non-Jews,) as a step toward full integration into society, in Russia, military conscription was often a rather stressful ordeal – on the conscript himself as well as for his

⁵⁹ I am here referring to those assimilationist Jews who sought to change the common stereotypes about Jews (in particular referring to those surrounding issues of loyalty). The more traditional Jews of Galicia and other areas were less concerned with their outside image.

⁶⁰ Schmidl, Erwin A. *Juden in der k. (u.) k. Armee 1788-1918*. (Eisenstadt: Studia Judaica Austriaca, 1989). Other sources (such as Paula Hyman) claim that France was the only army to allow Jewish officers.

⁶¹ Hyman, Paula E. *The Jews of Modern France*. (London: University of California Press, Ltd.: 1998).

family. While conscription may have been the carrot in Western Europe, it was the stick in Russia.

3.2 Jews in the Habsburg Army

The role of Jews in the Habsburg Armed Forces was one unique to the multinational empire. Not only was the situation of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe was very different from that of Jews in Western Europe (and their path to emancipation somewhat bumpier) but in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there was a distinct lack of national and ethnic identity; Despite the geographic territory encompassing numerous different cultures and languages, the antinational approach of the government (official records often did not indicate a citizen's place of birth, nationality or mother tongue⁶²) prevented the formation of strong ethnic and national identities; "In the nineteenth century, despite wild nationalist agitation, many people were still unconscious of their nationality, especially in the less-developed eastern provinces...a large proportion of the monarchy's inhabitants were uncertain of their nationality or were ready to change it instantly."⁶³ This at once placed Jews on an equal level with other soldiers, yet at the same time, defined their role as the "other" defined along religious lines. Typically credited with being the century of Jewish emancipation across continental Europe, the nineteenth century was a century of transformation not just for European Jewry, but for European society as a whole. Yet for the Jews, conflicting reactions

⁶² Deak, Istvan. *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. P. 21. Deak gives the example of *Conduite*- and *Qualifikations-Listen* which do not refer to an officer's origin or first language, "such considerations being of no importance to the antinationalist Habsburg army."

⁶³ Ibid, 14.

from the inside (reform and orthodox movements) and the pressure from the outside (rising anti-Semitism in central Europe) made this a century full of growing pains.

One of the important changes to central European Jewry in the nineteenth century was the shift westwards and into the cities. This urbanization, though common for non-Jews in this period as well, marked a separation of ghetto Jews from urban Jews. Whereas, in the rural areas, traditional Jewish life continued in many areas, urbanization brought with it a strong desire for not only emancipation, but assimilation as well. This was the period when the identity of Jews living in large metropolises began to shift from a Jewish identity to a more national one. In Vienna especially, Jews tended to shed their Jewish identity in favour of a German (or non-Jewish) one.⁶⁴ Others described a sort of tripartite identity, describing themselves as Jews by religion (arguably, of nationality, as well,) Jews were Austro-Hungarians by citizenship, and Germans by culture.⁶⁵ Military duty was often seen as entering into non-Jewish society, asserting their Jewishness (and “proving” their loyalty and dedication to the state).

Together with France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire appeared to have the most liberal policy regarding Jews in Europe, these being the two armed forces which allowed Jews to become

⁶⁴ Rozenblit, Marsha L. *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983. P. 7. Rozenblit explains that Viennese Jews had the highest conversion rates in Europe, and through a *Gymnasium* education and an acceptance of a new stereotypical career of choice (abandoning the traditional trade career in favour of clerical and managerial positions).

⁶⁵ Rozenblit, Marsha L. “Sustaining Austrian ‘National’ Identity in Crisis: The Dilemma of the Jews in Habsburg Austria, 1914-1919,” in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005). “‘We are Jews, we are Austrians, and when that is too little we are German-Austrians, by birth and customs, education and culture, attitude and feeling.’...Jews were German, not in a *voelkisch* sense but in a cultural one.” (p. 188).

officers⁶⁶ (before the First World War). Possible in large part to Joseph II style of enlightened absolutism (which led him to grant Jews more rights and freedoms [and in part, took away some of their special privileges] in the late eighteenth century,) the military successes of Jews living in the Habsburg Empire could also be attributed to a general lack of national identity felt by its inhabitants. Despite encompassing numerous different cultures and languages, the antinational approach of the government (official records often did not indicate a citizen's place of birth, nationality or mother tongue⁶⁷) prevented the formation of strong ethnic and national identities; "In the nineteenth century, despite wild nationalist agitation, many people were still unconscious of their nationality, especially in the less-developed eastern provinces...a large proportion of the monarchy's inhabitants were uncertain of their nationality or were ready to change it instantly.⁶⁸" The position of Jews, however, was as the eternal outsider (in many places, still physically separated from non-Jewish society) and while the others may not have been able to identify differences following national or ethnic lines, religious practices of the Jews separated them from their Christian comrades.⁶⁹

In the early years of Jewish participation in the military, the government introduced an option in response to a flood of letters from various Jewish communities which would allow a community to pay for the exemption of a young Jew from military conscription (which, until

⁶⁶ Schmidl, 131. Military service was reduced to 10-14 years at this time, and further reduced in 1845 and 1858 to 8 years and 7 years, respectively.

⁶⁷ Deak, Istvan. *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. P. 21. Deak gives the example of *Conduite*- and *Qualifikations-Listen* which do not refer to an officer's origin or first language, "such considerations being of no importance to the antinationalist Habsburg army."

⁶⁸ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁹ That said, rising, violent anti-Semitism emerged around the turn of the century and continued picking up momentum until the Second World War; the same period in which modern nationalism began to emerge in Europe.

1802, meant a lifelong commitment⁷⁰). This practice, called *Reluierung*, was abolished in 1806 (due to an angry Christian response) and reintroduced for short periods of time until 1846.⁷¹ The response of traditional Jewry to military service can be observed by the low number of Jews who were not bought out of military service in traditional areas; only 3 out of 300 Jews in Galicia were forced to join the military in 1793 (ie. Were not “paid off”).⁷²

3.3 Jews in the Russian Military

In the Russian Empire, the situation was vastly different, yet Russian Jews had also devised ways of escaping conscription - with very different motives, however, than simply “rejecting assimilation”. Russia acquired Jews very late compared to other states (with the acquisition of Polish lands in the various partitions in the late eighteenth century) and made it very clear from the very beginning that the Jews were the unwanted side-effects of the deal. Prior to the partition, one of the tsaritsa’s refused a recommendation from other states, claiming that Jews were beneficial to the economy, saying she wished to keep Russia Jew-free. The Polish lands, however, brought Russia almost one million Jews, and the ensuing Pale of Settlement helped keep the Jews as separate as possible from the major cities. Military service (as a conscript, or Cantonist) was one possible means of escaping from the Pale. Completing one’s duty meant the chance to settle somewhere outside of the Pale. However, completing one’s

⁷⁰ Schmidl, 113.

⁷¹ Silber, Michael K. “From Tolerated Aliens to Citizen-Soldiers: Jewish Military Service in the Era of Joseph II.” In *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005,) 31.

⁷² Ibid., 106.

term of service (rather, *surviving*) was often precarious and usually, after serving their term, Jews settled outside the Pale as Cantonists, and *not* as Jews.

Military service in the Russian Empire was not usually a pleasant experience, least of all for Jews. Firstly, the term of service was for 25 years, starting at age 18. This alone would not have been unusual for the time (Austro-Hungary, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, demanded lifetime service⁷³) had Jews not been conscripted at a shockingly early age – sometimes under the age of 8.⁷⁴ Conscription in Russia, too, was not only seen by Jews as a punishment but was also used as a reprimand, should a community fail to pay its debts in full, or as a penalty for failing to offer up their full quota of military recruits.⁷⁵

The introduction of military conscription for Jews by Tsar Nicholas I was also approached very differently than by other state leaders. Whereas leaders in Western Europe saw emancipation of Jews and their inclusion in military service as an obligation according to the enlightenment or the values of the French Revolution, Tsar Nicholas saw military service as a means for assimilating Jews by force, making them into obedient Christian Russians.

Describes one author, “how better to deal with an anarchic, feeble, and heretical group than through the army, where...’there is order, there is a strict unconditional legality, no impertinent claims to know all the answers, no contradiction, all things flow logically one from the other; no one commands before he has himself learned to obey; no one steps in front

⁷³ Schmidl

⁷⁴ Stanislawski, 25. Stanislawski describes accounts of children whose ages were not recorded, but who still had all of their baby teeth.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 183. In December, 1850, all Jewish communities present 3 extra recruits as a penalty for every one missing from their quota. Also, for every 2 000-ruble debt of the Jewish community in paying taxes, there was a fine of one additional conscript

of anybody else without lawful reason...’’⁷⁶ Military service was thus approached in a very different manner than in Western Europe by both Jews and the state; “Only in Russia was the conscription of the Jews neither ordered nor received as a herald or harbinger of their civic betterment. Military service in Russia, unlike the West, was not a duty borne equally by all citizens in exchange for the protection of the state and its laws but a burden selectively imposed by the government for social and economic, as well as strategic, reasons.”⁷⁷ Such policies as *Gradzhdane* and *odnodvortsky* were also introduced which increased quotas of western provinces so that Jewish communities were forced to contribute ten recruits annually per thousand members of the community (in comparison with the 5-7 biennial drafts for the non-Jewish population).⁷⁸

As already mentioned, it was often Jewish children selected for military service. This of course was no accident and was the result of an unofficial consensus between state officials and Jewish communities themselves. Because Jewish men tended to marry rather young (in their teens,) it was deemed more preferable to send children to the military rather than husbands and fathers who were also eligible. Older men were also already contributing to the struggling economy, and it would be detrimental to the good of the community should they be sent off.⁷⁹ Jewish community leaders often chose those children who were either orphaned or from especially destitute families, favouring sending those children to the military rather than learned Jewish children of better-off families who would contribute their knowledge to the community and were therefore considered more “valuable”.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 184.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 25.

Unsurprisingly, parents of impoverished children did not always willingly offer up their children for military service. This led to a phenomenon unique to the Russian Empire: the *khaper* (literally: snatcher). These *khapers* were essentially kidnappers who preyed on boys who might be offered up in the place of the “valuable” boys in the community. Sometimes, relatives of child recruits would turn to kidnapping, stealing another child to take the place of their relatives.⁸⁰ The line between what was acceptable and what wasn’t became increasingly blurred in the fight to protect one’s own family from the military.

Children were also favoured by the state in their desire to convert Jews to Christianity. Less committed to Judaism than their older counterparts, they were thought to be especially vulnerable to pressures to convert. Cut off from their families and from contact with other Jews, as well as the banning of Jewish traditions (prayer shawls, *tfilin*, the speaking of Yiddish, Jewish prayer services, and kosher food) led to the conversion of over half of Jewish Cantonists.⁸¹ For those who did not willingly give in to pressures, forced baptisms and torture were also introduced in some areas.⁸²

In order to escape recruitment from a job which would likely cost their Jewishness if not their lives, Jewish men often turned to drastic measures. Hiding in forests, running away from the community and self-mutilation were often routes chosen as more favourable than joining the military. This evasion of military duty was often carried out to such an extent that “the governor of Volhynia reported that such evasions were so widespread among the Jews of his

⁸⁰ Ibid, 30.

⁸¹ Ibid, 25. Stanislawski describes the conditions in the military and the banning of Jews to have contact to other Jewish, including non-soldiers in villages they might be passing through. It was also not uncommon for the military to serve *only* pork in an effort to break Jews of their Jewish habits.

⁸² Ibid, pp.22-4.

jurisdiction that it was quite common not to find even one eligible recruit in many Jewish communities during the conscription season”⁸³ Sometimes it was also possible for a family to find another Jewish man hiding in the woods or on his way without his papers, and he would then have been able to be drafted by that community in place of their own family men. Parents also made sure that their children received an education, so as to be considered valuable enough to keep from the military and also to ensure that their knowledge of Judaism was sufficient to keep them from converting should they be drafted anyway.⁸⁴ Perhaps due to their relative short time in the Empire (as opposed to Austro-Hungarian Jews, most of whom had spend generations within the borders of the Empire), and a possible resulting weak sense of state loyalty, or perhaps because of the vastly different motives for conscription by the state, this desperation to avoid military service at all costs (even at the cost of a toe or finger) was much more pronounced in the Russian Empire than in even the most traditional Jewish communities in the Habsburg Empire.

Loyalty issues abounded in Russia just as elsewhere. Jews were initially excused from military service (for a special “exemption tax” which was mandatory⁸⁵) as elsewhere because they were deemed unfit to be soldiers; “the Jews were exempted from service since they were assumed to be incapable of being soldiers because of their physical weakness, cowardice, religious fanaticism and suspect loyalty.”⁸⁶ However, although the extent to which Jews committed acts of self-harm and otherwise attempted to evade military service was much more pronounced in the Russian Empire than in Austro-Hungary, the responses by the state

⁸³ Ibid, 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 14. Guild merchants (who were also exempt from military service) were required to pay a similar tax.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

did not appear to change significantly in ensuing years, nor did an outcry emerge charging Jews with disloyalty to any larger extent than had been alleged before their inclusion in the military.

The most profound effect that Jews in the military in the Russian Empire had was on the Jewish communities, which had prided themselves on solidarity, and found strength in a relatively close-knit corporation. However, the chaos surrounding conscription and the ensuing panic embodied in the *khaper* pitted Jews against each other and broke down the community structure. “Entirely unexpected and astonishing, however, was the role that the Jewish leaders played in the new recruitment system: the fact that Jew was pitted against Jew in ways previously unimagined and that suffering was not shared equally by all Jews. The strength of traditional Jewish society had always been its solidarity. Although there were definite social and economic divisions among the Jews, these had never resulted in a true polarization of the community along class lines....Now it was Jew oppressing Jew.”⁸⁷

The experience of Russian Jewry with the military was one distinct from that of Jews of other militaries. Although having many of the same characteristics (issues of loyalty were still rampant, as was the question of whether or not Jews were even capable of military service, physically and because of their religious obligations,) the role played by military service was vastly different. In Western Europe seen as the herald of total emancipation and equal rights, in the Russian Empire, conscription was a punishment for the crime of existence and was understood as such by both the state and the community. “In the West, a similar process of differentiation and integration was – or at least seemed at the time to be – a progressive development, replacing corporate distinctions with individual rights. In Russia, where there

⁸⁷ Ibid, 31-33.

were neither corporate nor individual rights to enjoy, this same process of integration took on a repressive character, leveling the Jews to the lowest common denominator of rightlessness.”⁸⁸

By looking at the situation of Jews in other militaries, it becomes easier to put the case of German Jews into perspective. Many German Jews say their ticket into German society in joining the military; a way of becoming German without having to give up their religion. In the Habsburg lands, a shared culture, and a similarly large number of assimilationist Jews, one can find many comparable aspects to the German example; sadly, also several hints at the anti-Semitic stereotypes which were to culminate in the *Juden­zählung* of 1916. The Russian example is obviously drastically different than the German one, yet Russian conscription provides a useful comparison with how military service was approached by both Jews and non-Jews elsewhere in Europe on the eve of the First World War.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 17.

Chapter 4: The Reaction of German Jews to World War I: Opinion in 1914

*“I no longer know any parties, I know only Germans.”⁸⁹
Kaiser Wilhelm II, announcing the Burgfrieden (civic truce) August 4, 1914*

*„Fulfill your civil duties, and I will not ask your faith.”⁹⁰
Otto von Bismarck*

*“Jews should not get in the least involved...As soon as that happens, [the involvement] is bound to be misconstrued and maliciously interpreted.”⁹¹
Moses Mendelssohn*

At war's beginning, Germany's Jews welcomed the war with a fervor that was disproportionately high, especially among Jewish intellectuals.⁹² Like Jews in many armies in Europe, Jews in Germany saw participation in the military as a final stepping stone in the process of assimilation. The Kaiser affirmed their hopes of full assimilation through war, and for the next four years, out of 550,000 German Jews, over 100,000 served in the army (10,000 of these being volunteers) with 78% of them serving on the front lines. 30,000 German Jewish soldiers received decorations and 19,000 received promotions.⁹³ Out of these Jews, 12 000 Jews lost their lives in service of the *Vaterland*.

⁸⁹ Elon, 309.

⁹⁰ *Franz Rosenzweig über die am 16. Oktober 1916 vom Kriegsministerium angeordnete "Juden-zählung" an seine Mutter*, 16. Februar 1917.

⁹¹ Pulzer, 192.

⁹² Elon, 350.

⁹³ Rigg, 72.

At the beginning of the First World War, Jews all over Western and Central Europe celebrated; not only was the war waged against Russia, the notorious oppressors of Jews, but war was seen as a medium through which to gain acceptance into non-Jewish society. For Jews who saw an especially Jewish aspect to the war, “World War I became a *Rachekrieg fuer Kischinev*, a war of revenge for the pogroms, a war to liberate the Jews of occupied Galicia and of Russia itself.”⁹⁴ This was a personal war for them, fighting against the pogroms of the Russian Empire. However, this seemed to be the case more for those Jews of the Habsburg Empire than for German Jews. Because the Habsburg empire was so vast, it encompassed many so-called *Ostjuden* (the traditional, “ghetto” Jews) as well as assimilated *Kaffeehausjuden* (coffee-house Jews) and everything in between. Yiddish was the popular language, especially in the eastern reaches of the empire, and therefore the attacks on Russian Jews had a more direct impact on Jews in Austro-Hungary. For German Jews, however, the main motivator when it came to volunteering for military duty was that it was the last piece of the puzzle of assimilation. ““At least in war we are equal””⁹⁵ wrote one Jewish soldier, a few days before his death in battle. For German Jews, war was a prime opportunity to show their patriotism and loyalty to Germany; oftentimes, a newspaper would claim that it was a Jewish soldier who accomplished a special heroic or patriotic feat. One newspaper even once claimed that it was a Jewish soldier who had first captured the French flag of war (when this was found to be false, the newspaper replied in saying that it was a German soldier who captured the flag, whatever his religion). Through this one can see the image which German Jews were hoping to have in war; as loyal patriots, and as heroes, willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for the *Vaterland*.

⁹⁴ Rozenblit, Marsha “Sustaining Austrian ‘National’ Identity in Crisis: The Dilemma of the Jews in Habsburg Austria, 1913-1919” in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, 180.

⁹⁵ Elon, 308.

Besides perhaps having special importance for Jews (having the Russian Empire as an enemy,) and being a big step toward full acceptance into German society, for Jews of Germany in particular, war gave Germans another external enemy, which both groups could direct their anger against. “Venom once directed at Jews was now diverted to ‘perfidious England,’ producing a solidarity that seemed to confirm Freud’s dictum that it is easier to promote goodwill between two groups if there is a third they can both hate.”⁹⁶ Some of the fiercest hatred of foreign countries came from Jews. For example, this piece by Ernst Lissauer entitled “Hymn of Hate against England”:

*“We shall hate you with a long-lasting hate,
A hate that endures and will never abate.
Hatred by sea and hatred by land,
From those who wear crowns or who work by their hand,
Seventy millions all as one man,
United in love and united in love,
United in hatred of one single foe:
England!”⁹⁷*

This poetry (against England, Russia, the French, and other nations in general) appeared from various sources; from Zionist newspapers to Orthodox ones. The first issue of the *Jüdische Rundschau* appearing after the start of war had an article on the front page proclaiming “Enemies everywhere!” underneath a call to arms for all German Jews, and followed by an article claiming that despite the differences experienced in peacetime, all Germans were equal, regardless their creed.⁹⁸ In fact, the Zionist youth movement, *Blau-Weiss*, even managed to link Jewish nationalism with German nationalism, encouraging their youth to

⁹⁶ Ibid, 309.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 324.

⁹⁸ *Jüdische Rundschau*, no. 32, Aug 7-15, 1914.

support the war movement. Orthodox newspapers published articles calling for German Jews to “pile up [Russian] corpses in heaps and heaps!”⁹⁹,”

The Kaiser’s *Burgfrieden* (or civic truce) was not merely a speech of empty words; anti-Semitic acts really did decrease noticeably in the first months of war¹⁰⁰ - in fact, in light of the *Burgfrieden*, anti-Semitic periodicals were ordered by the military to halt publication of anything overtly anti-Jewish.¹⁰¹ It was also ordered that the victory proclamation (assumed to arrive after a few months) be posted on synagogues,¹⁰² a sign of respect that they, being German citizens, should be able to receive the news in a place common to the Jewish community. Furthermore, for the first time, Jews were permitted to become reserve officers in the German army.¹⁰³ Insofar as all of these acts communicated, it seemed that Germany’s Jews were well on their way to becoming accepted as full Germans. As Paul Rieger of the Centralverein (the organization of German Jews intent on combating anti-Semitism and gaining Jews full rights and equality within Germany) wrote, “‘The nation is like one family now...War had inaugurated a ‘divine peace’ among all Germans; love of the fatherland had ‘torn down all dividing walls.’”¹⁰⁴

The reaction of German Jews to the start of the First World War can be taken as a good example of their position in German society in 1914. Clearly, German Jews (or a large

⁹⁹ Elon, 322.

¹⁰⁰ Berger, 131.

¹⁰¹ Elon, 310.

¹⁰² Berger, 131.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Elon, 309.

proportion of them) were committed to Germany and were willing to fight – and die – for the Vaterland. That they were so enthusiastic about the war can also be taken as proof firstly of a deep affection for Germany itself; and secondly makes evident that their social position was such that they felt the need to go that extra mile and prove just how German they could be. Despite the politics of the extreme right wing, and anti-Semitism, there still remained enough hope that if Germany's Jews did enough to prove their loyalty and pay their dues, they could truly be accepted as Germans of the Judaic faith. Jewish literary figure, David Friedlander, captured the enthusiasm and hope best when he wrote about the wars of liberation a century earlier: "it was indeed 'a heavenly feeling to possess a fatherland! What rapture to be able to call a spot, a place, a nook one's own upon this lovely earth...Hand in hand with your fellow soldiers you will complete the great task; they will not deny you the title of brother for you will have earned it.'"¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Elon, 95

Chapter 5: Prejudice and Stereotypes Against Jewish Soldiers

As the war dragged on, German society became increasingly frustrated. More and more German soldiers were perishing, and the means of killing were becoming more deadly and more brutal. Although in peacetime it may have appeared that efforts at assimilation were successful, under the stress of such a tragic war, not everything can go according to plan; unfortunately for Jews, this meant the resurrection of some anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as profiteers and shirkers.

One common theme that underlines much of the Jewish literature during the First World War (especially in the early years, and the years leading up to 1914) is that of proving their worth, their worthiness of being Germans. Newspapers welcomed the war, calling to arms their Jewish sons in service of the *Vaterland*. Yet there is an undertone that can be sensed, which is deeper than simple patriotism; for example, the *Jüdische Rundschau* declared in large print that “this hour serves for us to newly prove, that we Jews, proud of our tribe, belong to the best of *Vaterlands*...we trust that our Jews will, strengthened in ideal disposition and manly courage through the support of Jewish consciousness and physical training, will excel in all of war’s virtues.”¹⁰⁶ In smaller print, the same newspaper claims that “despite all hostilities in peace time, we German Jews know no differences with other Germans. Fraternally, we stand with everyone in battle.”¹⁰⁷ Lost in the patriotism common to all newspapers of the time (Jewish and non-Jewish,) one can sense a feeling of duty, not just as German citizens, but as Jews hopeful of belonging to the German Volk. If Jews were really the stepchildren of

¹⁰⁶ *Jüdische Rundschau*, no. 32, Aug 7, 1914. P. 343.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

Germany, they certainly felt the push to prove themselves worthy of Germany's love; "We always had the feeling, in increasing masses, that we had to fulfil our duties, twofold."

Despite their efforts, anti-Semitism did not disappear as hoped. At the beginning of the war, when hopes at a *Burgfrieden* were still high, Graf Bernstorff, German diplomat in Washington, predicted that "after the war, Jew hatred will vanish. After the war, Jewish emancipation will totally and completely carried out."¹⁰⁸ But the war lasted longer than anyone had anticipated, and the more soldiers returned home wounded (or did not come home at all,) and the more brutal the means of killing became, the more old prejudices came to light. The anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as shirkers of military duty re-emerged and, together with other accusations, fuelled the formation of the *Dochstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back theory). Despite diminishing and almost vanishing at war's begin (perhaps due to finding a new enemy - as suggested previously – or perhaps the spirit of 1914 had really succeeded in breaking the barriers of ethnicity and religion,) anti-Semitism slowly began to rear its ugly head yet again.

Many of the stereotypes about Jews in the Germany were much the same as stereotypes of Jews in other armies. In the Habsburg army, for example, Jews were given the reputation as shirkers of military duty, often using self-harm as an excuse to avoid service.¹⁰⁹ The theme of shirking duty has also been linked by some scholars to the wider anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews being usurers or chafferers;¹¹⁰ in this case, bargaining for their own advantage, at the expense of others. The masses of Russian Jews deserting the military for the Habsburg also

¹⁰⁸ Berger, 133.

¹⁰⁹ Schmidl, Erwin A. *Juden in der k. (u.) k. Armee 1788-1918*. (Eisenstadt: Studia Judaica Austriaca, 1989).

¹¹⁰ Die Zeit. "Dazu haelt man fuer sein Land den Schaedel hin!" (42: 1996).

lent fire to anti-Semites, who took this as an example of Jewish disloyalty.¹¹¹ No doubt by the same token, for German soldiers, seeing Eastern European Jews claiming their loyalty to Germany (which, according to some sources, was not because of a special attraction to German culture or Germany, but rather a thought-out allegiance; according to these sources, Polish Jews declared their loyalty by choosing the side they thought would win the war, so as not to appear as collaborators should the war turn¹¹²). Seeing some Jews change their allegiances triggered some anti-Semites to apply this as characteristic of all Jews, including those within their own ranks. Additionally, the process of *Reluierung* (the option of trading money for conscription) lent weight to the argument that Jews were cowards; although no longer an option during the First World War, some form of the “Toleration Tax” was available until 1846, and still fresh in Habsburg history. Perhaps sensing the effects of the tax on assimilation efforts, Hungarian Jewry demanded an end to the tax already in 1810, arguing that “the Jews must now spill his blood as well as the Christian in the defense of the fatherland.”¹¹³

The *Judenzzählung* (Jewish census) stands as the most obvious anti-Jewish campaign of the war, and marked a turning point in the war effort, at least for Jews. While reactions to the actual census at the time differed, it, at least in retrospect, symbolizes the important shift of German public opinion (or at least that of the military) in just two short years, from 1914 to 1916.

¹¹¹ Schmidl.

¹¹² Pulzer, 198.

¹¹³ Silber, 31.

Chapter 6: The Judenzählung

In October 1916, War Minister Wild von Hohenborn ordered the so-called *Judenzählung*¹¹⁴ to determine how Jews were contributing to the war effort. The anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as “shirkers” (*Drückeberger*) was spreading around German society, and due to large numbers of complaints and accusations, the military decided to carry out the census (much to the dismay of the German government). The official reason given for the census was issued to disprove this misconception. While the results were never made public, the fact that the census had taken place was released to an anti-Semitic journalist, who then proceeded to produce two scathing essays on the topic, assuming, of course, that the findings confirmed the stereotype of Jewish soldiers.¹¹⁵ According to some, the results were not released in order to “spare Jewish feelings”¹¹⁶; the census was carried out to prove to the anti-Semites that Jews were fulfilling their duty on the front lines of battle (and thus protecting them,¹¹⁷) at least as well as other religions or nationalities. This claim, however, can be and was attacked for the simple fact that no other census was carried out for a comparison with other groups; Jews specifically were targeted.¹¹⁸ The census was actually carried out rather sloppily, not taking into account those Jews who had already died (which, by October, 1916, numbered almost three thousand¹¹⁹) or those Jews currently serving in the rear after being injured

¹¹⁴ Die Zeit, 36. The official title for the *Judenzählung* was “„Nachweisung der beim Heere befindlichen wehrpflichtigen Juden“ roughly translated as „Proof of the Jewish draftees in the army.”

¹¹⁵ Elon, 340.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 338.

¹¹⁷ *Jüdische Rundschau*, no. 48, Dec 1, 1916. P. 397.

¹¹⁸ Rosenthal, 80.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 338.

serving on the front lines.¹²⁰ Regardless of how they obtained their results, the facts were clear: Jews were disproportionately represented on the front (78-80% depending on the source) and were disproportionately represented in the army in general.

The *Judenzählung* took place despite strong opposition from the German government. The government, intent on holding together what was left of the *Burgfrieden* of 1914, realized the implications such a census would have on its Jewish majority, and the effect it might have on morale.¹²¹ The German government, for its part, did its best to minimize the effects of the census on the Jewish population. Jewish and non-Jewish politicians insisted that the *Judenzählung* had been issued with the sole purpose of “serving in opposition to anti-Semitic forces...well intended but very awkward!”¹²² However, by the time these excuses surfaced, the damage had been done. In fact, news of the “official” explanation often did not even make the front page, and appeared without commentary.¹²³

The reaction of many leading German officers to the census was varied; upon being told their responsibility to collect data for the census, some recall being instructed to remove Jews from front-line duty in order to minimize the figures, while others put more Jews onto the front to sway numbers.¹²⁴ Yet despite the actions of some, it was clear that the *Judenzählung* represented a growing prejudice toward Jews. Jewish soldier, Moritz Rosenberg, was of the opinion that “the statistic was only correctly made where one of the scribes was Jewish

¹²⁰ *Im Deutschen Reich*, no. 11, November 1916, p. 245.

¹²¹ Pulzer, 205.

¹²² *Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt*, no. 43, November 10, 1916, p. 2. Quoting *Reichstag* politician, Heine.

¹²³ *The Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt*, for example, or the *Jüdische Rundschau*.

¹²⁴ Pulzer, 205.

himself...after my own experiences, I am of the opinion that the then-census was absolutely false, and did not even have the most remote statistical value.”¹²⁵ Perhaps anticipating a census similar to the *Juden­zählung*, 1915 saw the formation of the “office for statistics of Jews,” which in the fall of 1916 (at the time of the *Juden­zählung*) founded a committee for war statistics, whose purpose it was to present the achievements made by Jews during the war.

The fact that the *Juden­zählung* took place in 1916 can be attributed to the war growing to something more brutal and more deadly than anyone had imagined in 1914. What was at first thought to last a few months dragged on over years, gains and losses were reduced to minimal territory, and more and more soldiers became injured or died. By 1916, all hopes of a quick victory had vanished, and an explanation was sought to figure out *why* events were unfolding as they were. However, despite the *Burgfrieden* announced 1914, anti-Semitism had not completely disappeared from German society. Jews, as a minority already labeled as usurers, profiteers or shirkers (*Drückeberger*) provided the needed scapegoat, and slowly but surely, anti-Semites brought this to the attention of leading military officials who carried out the controversial census.

Walter Rathenau stated in August of 1916 (just months before the *Juden­zählung*.) that “the more Jews die in this conflict...the more persistent will be their opponents’ complaints that the Jews did nothing but sit behind the front lines profiteering from the war.”¹²⁶ This prophetic statement was realized as the war dragged on. Wealthy Jews like Rathenau were criticized for not offering up enough money for the war effort. Other Jews tended to be

¹²⁵ Rosenthal, 80.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 337.

placed in high positions, figuring in disproportionately high numbers in the provisional government following the abdication of the Kaiser, and being well-represented in soldiers' councils.¹²⁷ This visibility (due in large part to the fact that their Jewishness was always reported) led to the *Dochstoßlegende* (the stab-in-the-back legend,) that Jews had masterminded the submission of Germany at war's end. Due to factors like these, suspicions were rising about the commitment of Jews to the German war effort (despite the fact that before the war, or at war's start, many prominent Jews, including Rathenau, supported the war wholeheartedly).

6.1 The Reaction of Zionist Press to the Judenzählung

The Zionist weekly, the *Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt*, reacted to the *Judenzählung* with the immediate assumption of its anti-Semitic intentions and saw the census as proof of the inability of Germany to fully accept its Jews. "For [Jewish history] the fact is without great meaning; one more occasion to a thousand others, one more symptom to countless others, one new expression of anti-Semitism to the infinitely many..."¹²⁸ Only for those Jews who "in weak self-deceiving of the truth, imagined that every trace of anti-Semitism in Germany was forever and evermore extinguished at the beginning of the war,"¹²⁹ claimed the periodical, should the census have had any meaning or caused any agitation. In this approach, the *Judenzählung* as such, was unimportant, but represented and brought to light a

¹²⁷ Elon explains that because these soldiers' councils were represented by lower-class soldiers, and Jews were so rarely promoted to the rank of officer, they figured high. Also, since Jews tended to be among the better educated of soldiers, they were often assigned roles in public speaking.

¹²⁸ *Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt*, no. 42, November 3, 1916, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

pre-existing prejudice that, in the *Burgfrieden*, had merely been put aside or covered up in the excitement of the war. The *Jüdische Rundschau*, another Zionist paper, agrees with the *Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt* in that the census was the result of an anti-Semitism so deeply rooted in society that it could not be erased, yet offers the suggestion: “There is only one way to an effectively combat Jew-hatred. It is the way of the redemption of Jews from their separation through concentration on a shared territory.”¹³⁰

As could have been expected from Zionist newspapers, a sort of blame was put on assimilationist Jews (the Jews who had imagined that anti-Semitism could be conquered by will and shows of bravery). Only those Jews (who, the newspaper hopes, is the minority) should have been the ones affected by the *Juden-zählung*; only those who had not yet seen the promise of Zionism were supposedly the ones surprised.

As tended to be the natural reaction to any large-scale anti-Semitic acts (such as the Dreyfus Affair in France,) many Jews turned to Zionism as a coping method. Indeed, the number of members in Zionist organizations in Germany grew from a pre-war number of 8 964 (in 1912) to 20 000 in 1920.¹³¹ As Jews were not able to fit into the society they so desired, the obvious solution was to declare that they were a separate society, a separate people in need of a separate land. Ernst Simon, for example, writer and later co-founder of *Brit Shalom*, felt a deep betrayal from the *Juden-zählung* (having been an avid war-supporter in the fervor of 1914¹³²). His turn to Zionism was fueled by the feeling that, “the census reopened the deep

¹³⁰ *Jüdische Rundschau*, no. 43, October 27, 1916, p. 351.

¹³¹ Rosenthal, 84.

¹³² Although whether “war fever” or the “spirit of 1914” really existed at the time (in most places, among most people) or whether it was an image created after the war in nostalgia is still debated. See Verhey, Jeffrey. *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

chasm that ‘could not be bridged by common language, work, civilization, and custom.’”¹³³

For some Jews, the *Judenzählung* was only added proof that even the ultimate sacrifice-the sacrifice of their lives in battle-was not enough; “so this is why one gives his skull to his country” wrote lieutenant Julius Marx.¹³⁴

6.2 The Reaction of Assimilationist Press to the *Judenzählung*

Until 1922, when the Centralverein released its own newspaper, the CV Zeitung, its means of communication was through the periodical, *Im Deutschen Reich*. Unlike the Zionist press who not only shamed the assimilationist Jews for foolishly believing in earning equality but who also made the *Judenzählung* representative for the much larger beast of anti-Semitism, *Im Deutschen Reich* responded to news of the census practically. Arguing the flawed logistics of the census, such as the failure to include those soldiers moved to the rear after serving (and often being injured) on the front (some of which also having earned medals for bravery). These soldiers were now officially being labeled as “shirkers.”¹³⁵ Additionally, had the official reason been valid, and the census was being carried out to prove the achievements of Jews, it failed to offer any sort of comparison. If the census was issued on the grounds of proving Jews to be as capable as other religions, why were no other groups examined?¹³⁶ However, the assimilationist press was cautious when labeling the German government and German society as anti-Semitic, and is noticeably gentler on the topic of

¹³³ Elon, 339

¹³⁴ Berger, 176.

¹³⁵ *Im Deutschen Reich*, no. 11, November 1916, p. 245.

¹³⁶ Rosenthal, 80.

anti-Semitism in general than other periodicals; for the assimilationists stood for hope. Hope in integration and in social emancipation. Hope for equality. And hope that the efforts and lives of so many Jewish soldiers would be worth it.

6.3 Some Final Thoughts

While for some the *Judenzählung* evoked a change in ideology (a shift to Zionism,) for others, the *Judenzählung* demanded a response, a defense of their Jewish soldiers. Jewish Reichstag deputy Ludwig Haas admitted that perhaps the (assumed) results of the census were true, but that it was not the fault of the Jews, but of German society: ““We cripple them and complain that they limp.””¹³⁷ Writer and later president of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann, (writing under a pseudonym,) claimed that the “Jews had nothing to do with this war; its origins, its aims, its content were totally alien to them. It was taking place outside their sphere.”¹³⁸

Behind the scenes, a struggle regarding the census took place, with Jewish lawyer Oskar Cassel, Counselor of Justice and chair of the Centralverein and the association of German Jews (Verband der deutschen Juden) representing the interests of German Jewry in general. Cassel, meeting with the director of the Zentraldepartment, Oberst Ulrich Hoffmann, General Hermann von Stein (war minister replacing Wild von Hohenborn, who had been ejected from

¹³⁷ Ibid, 340.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

his position following the scandal) and others, trying to gain some sort of compensation for the harm inflicted by the census.¹³⁹

The end of the First World War was not celebrated with as much enthusiasm as the start. After 4 years of death and brutality on a scale unimaginable before, the end of the war must have come as a relief to many.¹⁴⁰ The theme that emerged predominantly in Jewish periodicals and newspapers at the end of the war was that of anti-Semitism. While before the war, and at war's beginning, the idea of *Burgfrieden* reigned, at the end of the war, focus had shifted into emigration (*Im Deutschen Reich*, for example, poses the question where the best destination is to emigrate to,) pogroms (the *Jüdische Rundschau* describes various pogroms in Western Galicia, Poland and Romania) and anti-Semitism in general (all newspapers explored, at least to a certain extent, the *Judenfrage*).

German historian, Jacob Rosenthal, describes the significance of the *Judenzählung* as such: the census, as the only one of its kind to take place in Europe (although talk did circulate in Austro-Hungary of a similar census before being forbidden by the government) showed a certain stubbornness of German society to abandon the stereotype of Jews as shirkers of duty. Whereas almost everywhere else in Europe (Austria, France, Great Britain and Greece) the stereotype had all but been dismissed as anti-Semitic trash, in Germany, it resulted in the *Judenzählung*. Had the results been released and not covered up during the war, perhaps the record would have been set straight, and old prejudices might not have led to sort of anti-Semitism that emerged in Germany.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ See Rosenthal, pp. 68-79.

¹⁴⁰ Of course there were some for whom war's end was not desirable (at least, not with the outcome of Germany losing).

¹⁴¹ Rosenthal, 106.

Chapter 7: Another time, another place: What makes the case of German Jews different from other minorities in other militaries?

The case of Jewish soldiers in the German military shares many similarities with other minorities in other armies. To use a well-known example, the 100th Infantry Battalion of the 442nd Infantry Regiment in the United States Army during the Second World War.

Roosevelt's form of *Burgfrieden* came in the form of "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry" yet when the time came that Japan entered the war, Executive Order 9066 was carried out, resulting in the internment of first and second generation Japanese immigrants. Despite their position, many second-generation Japanese (Nisei,) especially from Hawaii, demanded their right to fight for the United States. The 100th eventually earned the nicknamed the "Purple Heart Battalion;" despite suffering an unusually high casualty rate, it became the most decorated unit in American history for its size.

Like the Jews of the German army, the eagerness of the Nisei to defend their homeland was disproportionately high. The notion of somehow having to prove themselves remained strong here as well, and it seemed that, too, were intent on becoming a model minority in their country. The case of the Nisei seems even more intense when one remembers that even while their men were in Europe risking (and, to a much larger degree than other units, losing) their lives, their families remained interned. The issue of loyalty was also at hand, with the American government issuing questionnaires to internees before reluctantly allowing them into the military. The questions ranged from whether they would support the United States wherever ordered, and if they would forswear "any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor." Had such a questionnaire been issued to Jews in Germany prior to the

First World War, it would have shown similar results: that they were willing to give everything to the *Vaterland*.

There are, however, certain elements which make the case of Jewish soldiers unique. The most obvious trait perhaps is the outcome. That the loyalty of Jews in the German military (and, naturally, also, outside of the military realm) was so doubted was the result of a growing anti-Semitism in German society, one that would lead to the *Dochstoßlegende* and eventually to the Holocaust years later. The case of Jews is unique in the sense that anti-Semitism is unique from other prejudices: it is a religious, not (necessarily) racial discrimination. Described by some scholars as “the longest hatred,” it has at its base religion and not race. In the case of the Nisei in the United States army (or black soldiers, for that matter,) the issue at hand is predominantly race; in the case of Jews, the physical distinction from other soldiers was less obvious. In addition, most other discriminations, especially during war, deal with the issue of co-nationals; that despite being a citizen of one country, one might feel a desire to help out an enemy state because of family heritage. In the case of the Nisei in the United States, while largely a racial issue, charges of disloyalty were founded on the fears that they would choose to support Japan, their ancestral homeland, rather than the United States. Germans fighting in the American army in the Second World War faced similar obstacles because of this. For Jews in the German army, however, there was no national homeland. The only fears that may have existed lay in the fact that there were Jews in other countries: would Jews choose to defend Germany, or would they feel a certain brotherly loyalty to other Jews in other armies? However, while possibly worrying for some, for most, this was not the main argument in Germany when charging that Jews were not carrying their weight in the military.

Conclusion

In retrospect, it seems remarkable that the participation of a minority should be so contested in a modern state viewed by many as so tolerant.¹⁴² Even at the time of the First World War, France had already established its foreign legion, and even Britain had formed a Jewish legion of foreign volunteers; if the loyalty or ability of any minority should have been called into question and had such catastrophic consequences, one would have expected it to have been that of foreigners (the fifth column charge). Yet it was the German-born Jews who, during the First World War, despite having given their best efforts, were the subject of scrutiny and faced charges of cowardice and disloyalty.

If the goal of much of German Jewry was to emerge from the war with a new identity, the results were rather mixed. German society had presented an iron gate toward the Jews; even the sacrifice of life (or of thousands of lives) could not penetrate it. The *Judenanzählung* marked the response of Germany to its Jewish soldiers: they were unwanted and distrusted, at least by a powerful sector of society. No amount of courage could earn Jews social emancipation, or counter the belief that they were somehow unwilling or incapable of military service. Despite their best efforts, in this respect, success evaded them. As much as they may have tried to put their differences and prejudices aside, and believe in the proclaimed *Burgfrieden*, anti-Semitism had already (at least to a certain extent) rooted itself

¹⁴² Elon, 252. Elon gives the example of Victor Klemperer, who claimed that “he felt ‘abroad’ in Italy or France, in Austrian-rule Bohemia, he sensed he was in ‘enemy territory’. Anti-Semitism, unequalled elsewhere in the West, was said to be rampant there...In Bohemia, Czechs hated them for being Germans and Germans despised them for being Jews.”

in Germany, such that even the ultimate sacrifice of the lives of thousands of Jews could not undo its effects on society.

The emancipation of German Jewry was never a smooth road. The granting and revoking of certain rights and responsibilities in the 19th Century (especially in areas for a time occupied by France,) and anti-Semitic attacks on German Jews (as in the so-called “Hep Hep” riots of 1819) confounded the situation such that political emancipation, when granted, lacked the support of German society needed to ensure a social emancipation would follow. Indeed, in 1812, when Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III granted Jews emancipation, it was an order from above (and still excluded Jews from government and teaching positions,) and three years later, in 1815, upon Napoleon’s defeat, was revoked. In the words of noted Zionist Max Nordau, who compared the granting of political emancipation to the Jews with a piano in a drawing room (which no family member is able to play,) “in this manner Jews were emancipated in Europe not from an inner necessity, but in imitation of a political fashion; not because the people had decided from their hearts to stretch out a brotherly hand to the Jews, but because leading spirits had accepted a certain cultured idea which required that Jewish emancipation should figure also in the Statute book.”¹⁴³ In the same manner, military service and conscription were given to the Jews; grudgingly, Jews were accepted for service (and reluctantly granted the right to promotion) not because they were particularly desired for, but out of necessity.

German historian, Amos Elon suggests that had Jewish emancipation occurred in Germany a generation or two earlier, before the romantic *völkisch* nationalism had taken a hold of the

¹⁴³ Nordau, Max. *Address at the First Zionist Congress, 1897*.
<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/6640/zion/nordau.html> (Retrieved May 26, 2008).

nation, the outcome may have been different¹⁴⁴; perhaps then, Jews could have been accepted as a part of the German nation before the construction of the national narrative instead of remaining as outsiders of a *Volk* who had solidified its boundaries. Whatever the reason (“what if” questions are all too easy to pose retrospectively,) the fact is that, culminating in the First World War, German Jews had vied for a prize – acceptance, and for some, a new identity – which German society was not willing to grant them.

¹⁴⁴ Elon, 100

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