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David Caro: Jewish, German, Polish

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Abstract: David Caro was an advocate of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) who lived most of his life in Poznan. This article examines the role of Idealism in his published works, his aspirations for cultural and political development, his much-noted programme for rabbinic reform, and his campaign for modern schooling for Jews. Previous studies have characterised Caro's work as either radical or as moderate in respect to his aspirations for religious reform. The present article seeks to reframe the study of Caro's thought with attention to his context – Jewish, German and Polish – and through closer examination of his absorption of Idealist cultural, educational and political thought.

Keywords: David Caro (c. 1782-1839); Enlightenment; Haskalah; Germany; Jews in Poznan/Posen; German and Jewish cultural nationalism; Idealism and school reform; modern rabbinic Judaism

Abstrakt: David Caro był orędownikiem żydowskiego oświecenia (haskali). Większość życia spędził w Poznaniu. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje rolę idealizmu w opublikowanych pracach Caro, jego pragnienie rozwoju kulturalnego i politycznego Żydów, a także jego głośny program reformy rabinicznej oraz kampanię na rzecz nowoczesnego szkolnictwa dla Żydów. Wcześniejsze badania charakteryzowały twórczość Caro jako radykalną lub umiarkowaną w odniesieniu do uznawania potrzeby żydowskiej reformy religijnej. Przedstawiony tekst ma na celu przeformułowanie badań nad myślą Caro, poprzez mocniejsze uwzględnienie kontekstu żydowskiego, niemieckiego i polskiego oraz dokładniejsze zbadanie jego recepcji idei idealistycznych w perspektywie kultury, edukacji i polityki.

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Słowa kluczowe: David Caro (ok. 1782-1839); oświecenie; haskala; Niemcy; Żydzi w Poznaniu; niemiecki i żydowski nacjonalizm kulturowy; idealizm i reforma szkolnictwa; współczesny judaizm rabiniczny

Introduction

The most noted Jewish advocate of the Enlightenment in early nineteenth century Poznan, David Caro (c. 1782-1839), developed a combination of literary, educational, and broader cultural and political programmes which refl ected the distinctive experience of the Jewish community in the Poznan/Posen region. Under the Prussians, the city and the surrounding province, both known to German speakers as Posen, were governed under a discrete system with separate regulations for the Jewish population (on this, see, e.g., Kemlein 2001; Sariel 2013). The use of Posen in this article reflects this historic situation.

Caro's first widely-noted essay – on modern principles of education, 'Giddul Banim' ('The Education of Youth') – was serialised in the Hebrew journal *Me'assef* in 1810-1811. He then launched a career-long struggle for Jewish schooling in Posen, integrating German, Hebrew and Polish elements and preparing Jewish students for integrated studies at Gymnasium and university. In 1820, he published *Brit Emet* (True Covenant), a broadside against the reaction of more conservative rabbis to the reforms introduced in the Hamburg synagogue, which cast a range of widely accepted beliefs and customs as irrational and urged (in a second part, *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim*, 'Characteristics of the Rabbis') a reform to the formation of the rabbinate oriented towards ethical conduct and wider community welfare.[1] Much of his output was poetic, dealt with the history of Judaism,[2] or focused on the learning of languages – Hebrew, German and Polish.[3] One further intervention to which we will return was an article published in 1837 written in response to an essay by Jewish reformer Abraham Geiger on the education of women. Though the subject might have been dealt with through a straightforward focus on issues arising for women in Judaism, Caro connected these to wider political and cultural

[1] The historian of modern Judaism Michael Meyer has noted (Meyer 1995, 101) that *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* was the first such manifesto for rabbinic Reform. The work was the subject of an essay by Robert Katz (Katz 1966), and an interesting dissertation by a rabbinic student of Meyer (Lapidus 2013).

[2] On the book's publication, Caro translated *Die gottesdienstlichen Vortraege der Juden* [Sermons in Jewish Worship] by Leopold Zunz into Hebrew. He also wrote a few short descriptive essays on rabbis flourishing during the elaboration of the Mishnah and Talmud. See further discussion in Lippmann 1840.

[3] Details of Caro's published and unpublished works will be found in Lippmann 1840, Bloch 1887, and Lapidus 2013.

developments and the article indicates well how Caro saw the breadth of his interests were connected in addressing cultural change and the political priorities of the times.

There has yet to be a satisfying work on the inspiration Caro drew from a range of thinkers – reformists of different generations and with different attitudes to the role of reason and character in human development. There is equally great scope for further scholarship focusing on his response to changing environmental influences during his life, particularly those reflecting conditions in Posen. In this article, I will signal the relevance of key developments in his life and career, before reviewing key elements of the worldview which emerges from his publications.

Much of what is known of Caro's life is contained in the biography written shortly after his death by Nathan Lippmann (Lippmann 1840), a relative by marriage, and in his dissertation on Caro Micah Lapidus (2008) makes us sensible to the limitations that this account has. The tenor of Lippmann's account is reflected in much subsequent commentary according to which Caro may be judged a radical or a moderate reformer according to his attitude to the power of the rabbinate, which was a brake on the cultural transformation which he sought to effect through modern schooling. In what follows, the richness of Caro's humanistic commitment and the challenges he took on in effecting practical change within the Jewish community in Posen, will make the dualistic framing of Caro as either radical or moderate appear less compelling. The model for change which he saw to be necessary did not start with a robust or an accommodating approach to political or institutional power, but with a faith in the development of individuals and of civil society, requiring bold but also careful harnessing of the power of culture. What interested him most were markers of his Idealist thought and reading.

1. David Caro and the Jewish community in Poznan/Posen

Caro's reported involvement in a communal conflict over the appointment of Rabbi Akiva Eiger as Chief Rabbi of Posen meant that by 1815, Caro had a reputation in the Posen Jewish community as a leading opponent of the control exercised over community decision making by the traditionalist rabbinic elite. The publication of *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* in 1820 underscored this reputation, and among its targets was Chief Rabbi Eiger. On the basis of these factors in particular, later observers have cast Caro as a radical *maskil*, committed to the overturning of rabbinic norms and communal control (see, e.g., Bloch 1887; Neuschloss 1956, 65, 79-82; Bleich 1985, esp. 4-5; and see further literature noted in Lapidus 2008, 13 n. 14).

Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim is also the product of a considerable rabbinic education, during most of which Caro was fully integrated into the traditionalist institutions of the Posen Jewish community. The communities of Prussian-controlled Poland were diverse, and in the region of Posen they were barely touched by the struggle between pious spiritualists, Hasidim, and their traditionalist 'opponents', Misnagdim. The Jewish communities of Posen and of towns across the region were instead largely traditionalists where the maintenance of custom and communal unity was concerned, and rationalist moderates with respect to the acceptance of philosophical approaches to Judaism, on the model of Moses Maimonides. There was a local pride in the leading place that the Jewish community of Posen had taken within Polish Judaism, both in convening the Council of the Four Lands and through the reputation of its yeshiva. Vis-à-vis the modern reformers of the West, the Posen rabbis positioned themselves as defenders of mainstream religious Judaism (see, e.g., Bleich 1985). Once Prussia took its Polish territories, between 1793 and 1815, Posen was the second largest Jewish community that it ruled. In respect to the size of the Jewish communities in these two locations, Jewish affairs in Posen and Lemberg were more favourable for the maintenance of large traditionalist community institutions than was the case elsewhere in German lands. The Posen rabbis nevertheless conducted the community in ways that were as recognisable to defenders of halakhic orthodoxy in the West as they were to traditionalist rabbis to the east, making concessions that were seen as necessary while defending interests that were seen as essential to the preservation of community values and cohesion (Bleich 1985; Ferziger 2005, 77-83).

The biography by Lippmann gives particular attention to key developments in Caro's childhood which could give the impression that Caro was a parvenu in this religiously restrictive environment, and little attention to his continuing communal ties. Caro was born in Fordon, a town then in Posen which is now part of Bydgoszycz, the son of a local rabbi. Caro's mother separated from his father and moved to Posen in 1800.[4] She married again, to a wealthy community member, and not long after Caro's bar mitzvah his mother and stepfather found him a bride, with whom he moved to Sierpc, near Plock, taking on the Hasidic Judaism of his wife. Caro's first marriage did not work, and he returned to Posen, reading his way into Enlightened German thought in the library of his stepfather, and, with a small circle of sympathisers, gradually turning against the superstitions of traditionalist Judaisms, both Hasidic and Misnagdic. His notion of life-affirming culture reflected German and Hebrew

[4] There is a more complicated background story to this than Lippmann and subsequent scholars have noted. David Caro had a younger brother, Kaskel, born in Posen in 1785. They also had Caro cousins living in the city, with whom they may have lived. Both factors may have made Caro less of a parvenu in the Jewish community of Posen than Lippmann indicates.

literature and thought, though it extended also to the cultures he identified with place, with community and with nationhood, which in Posen meant a multilingual formation and public conversation which included Polish and Judeo-German.

Caro was in some respects at the heart of the Jewish religious community in Posen, whose affairs are not clearly enough understood through the impact of a rift between the traditionalist elite and a dissident section of youth, real as this was. Like other members of his philosophical reading circle, which operated quietly in the face of censure from the leaders of the community's respected yeshiva (college), Caro was taught in the college, reportedly by, among others, some of the most senior rabbis, including Eleasar Zilz (Wilke 2004, 926; Zilz is also spelt elsewhere as Suelz). The community's religious institutions were bunched around Judenstrasse, and community members, whether more or less open to modern cultural pursuits, lived in streets nearby together with a range of German and Polish speaking Christians. The Caro family shared experiences with other prominent families within the community: they had moved across what became Prussian Poland, where his forebears and cousins were prominent rabbis and legal authorities. Lippmann made of Caro's early life a narrative of displacement and disruption, physical, intellectual and religious, a background to his break with traditionalism. However, Caro's own construction of the conditions for traditionalist rabbinic institutions to degrade or perform well did not lead him to completely reject them. His focus in *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* was more on the conditions in which corruption and an excessively inward gaze produced intellectual stasis and ineffective relationships with political and social interlocutors outside the community. In *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim*, Caro also identified elements of religious Jewish traditionalism which were praiseworthy and marked by integrity. In praising the virtue of Isaiah Horowitz, author of the early seventeenth century ethical will *Shnei Luchot HaBrit*, he communicated a faith in a traditionalist whose influence extended across Europe's more pious communities. Whereas he charged rabbinic leaders with an excessive focus on learning and teaching the Talmud, his own prescription for a morally renewed and rational Judaism returned to religious-legal authorities which were fully a part of the traditionalist scholarship promoted in communities in Posen. These were also reflective of his own family's journey to Poland from Germany at the turn of the eighteenth century, and earlier still from the Ottoman Empire and Spain. Caro's text rated medieval and early modern authorities accepted within the community, notably Moses Maimonides and Joseph Caro (David Caro's family were descended from a brother of Joseph). His own sons would have an education both reflecting his modernising agenda, and also covering key features of traditionalist education. This enabled his son Simon to emigrate to Norwich in England,

where he was the minister, shochet (provider of kosher meat), and teacher of the Jewish community's elementary school, teaching Aramaic (a basic requirement for Talmudic studies) and biblical Hebrew.

Through his activities, Caro had in mind that the different parts of the Jewish community needed effective collective representation, in conditions of continuing insecurity. Political changes affected Jewish communities, vulnerable as minorities, objects of elite contempt, managing their affairs as non-citizens, members of community institutions which were not recognised as legal persons, and commonly subject to a communal indebtedness (Kemlein, 2001) indicative of a more basic vulnerability. Jewish commercial enterprises were an established feature of town economies across the region, subject to the support of local communities and to wider sources of economic and political stability. Caro – who tried his hand in trade unsuccessfully (Lippmann 1831) before committing himself to teaching – argued in *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* that Jews should support themselves financially, and not rely on others to support the religious interests of the community. *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* was concerned both with the development of robust individuals of moral character and with the conditions for moral advance at community level.

In his time, the community's representation in discussions with the government came primarily from acculturated German speakers, business owners, modernist *stadtlanim*, and at times they competed fiercely for the ear of the authorities with the rabbinate. This is a context in which Caro's public positions should be understood, and from which his thinking was not isolated. The families of community representatives played a central role in the philosophical reading circle centred around Caro, and in the negotiations within the Posen Jewish community over the conditions in which Akiva Eiger would be accepted as Chief Rabbi in 1814-1815. They were the supporters of the elementary school initiatives which Caro directed, and it was they – not Caro – who managed discussions with Posen government officials about the conditions in which Jewish schooling would be run. We should imagine these families as integrated within the Jewish community, as well as geared towards the betterment of Jewish relations with the city government and civil society. Jews of a liberal, professional or commercial inclination took part in German and to a much lesser extent Polish cultural activities as individuals, but not as a collectivity, particularly insofar as they remained non-citizens.[5] On some issues, such as imposing obligatory military service on members of the Jewish community, the more conservative rabbis and more liberal lay representatives of the Jewish community diverged – this was an issue which dogged the relation-

[5] The first regulation in the Prussian province of Posen which provided for wealthier Jews who spoke German to become a citizen appeared in 1833. Caro became a citizen at this time.

ships of the Jewish community with the government and with members of the Posen parliamentary assembly across the 1820s, and which increased pressure for at least some Posen Jews to be granted citizenship (see Laubert 1922). Caro favoured compulsory military service, which would come with citizenship, whereas Chief Rabbi Eiger was concerned that military service would weaken the religious commitments of community members. In spite of a series of attempts on the part of the government to demand changes in Jewish civic engagement and Jewish schooling – separate from but in parallel with reforms demanded of Catholic and Protestant schooling – it was not until the formal recognition of the Jewish community as a corporation in 1834 that the governing authorities took an active part in ensuring Jewish schooling. 1834 also saw the recognition by the Prussian authorities for the first time of a representative assembly within the Jewish community, and the first representatives included both traditionalists and modernisers. A celebration of this event was carefully geared to demonstrate loyalty and patriotism to the Chief President (*Oberpräsident*), Eduard von Flottwell. The Chief Rabbi made a speech with blessings for the government (Neuschloss 1956, 118-121) which was not so different from the speech given by Caro (Caro 1834). In spite of Lippmann's emphasis on Caro's distance from the traditionalist rabbinic leadership in the city, and in spite of the evident antipathy of the Chief Rabbi to Caro and to other lay leaders who he deemed insufficiently learned to be trusted to represent the faith (Bleich 1985), it is also evident that Caro relied upon a network of Caro cousins to support him within the community, and on the families of the leading community representatives, such as Wolf Eichborn and Peter Lippmann. Caro's interest in religious reform at rabbinic and school levels was intended to reflect a reality in which Jewish communities were effectively represented by German speaking laymen who faced an unequal relationship with government figures, and who faced enmity towards Jews as a cultural and as a religious group, of which Caro was consistently conscious across his career. This would remain a ground for seeming moderation across his career, as we shall see below, even while his reputation as a radical in relation to reform of the religious community was also well-deserved.

2. Caro's philosophical interests

Caro and a group of yeshiva students in Posen gathered to read philosophical texts in the privacy of their homes from 1812, when Caro had already published his text on educating young men in *Me'assef*, 'Giddul banim'. Lippmann records the group readings were initiated with Moses Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch and Psalms, and that these had awakened

a desire for German language learning. Besides the works of Mendelssohn and Lessing, they also studied the writings of other Enlightened rationalists, reading French fragments from Voltaire, Rousseau, and Frederick the Great, as well as German Christian Idealists, notably Christian Garve, Johann Jakob Engel, and Friedrich Schiller, whose interests lay beyond the focus on reason of the earlier generations of rationalists. From Caro's writing, it is evident that his interests in both groups of writers were schematic, and not simply eclectic.

'Giddul banim' is a spirited argument for modern educational methods, which draws on a range of pedagogical texts without naming them. In some respects, the essay reflects the educational interests of generations of modernists, from rationalist advocates of the Enlightenment, notably John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to more recent Idealist writers in German lands, among whom scholars have noted the influence on Caro of Joachim Heinrich Campe and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Caro did correspond with Pestalozzi, and with the initiators of other modern schools for Jews (in Westphalia, for instance) and for Jews and Christians (in Dessau, where Campe briefly taught). I have not found such correspondence from the period before the essay was published.[6] Caro introduced his essay with reference to the general aims of Enlightened education – to build character, happiness, spirit, hope and knowledge through work and exposure to nature, and to avoid ignorance, laziness and dependency. This core set of interests was common to the writing of Locke and Rousseau, and to the Philanthropins of the Dessau school. The Hebrew reader might also read into 'Giddul banim' a recognisable interest in character-building typical of medieval and of early modern mussar literature, which was popular across Polish Jewish communities.[7] There is also a set of interests which suggest something not shared by the thinkers most focused on rationalism or on universalist framings of humanity, among whom the Philanthropins were notable. Caro related his keen interest in the influence of language on character – both individual character and the collective character of peoples – and that speaks to his interest in the work of Mendelssohn, and even more so in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. Both Mendelssohn and Herder saw in Biblical Hebrew poetry and language a model for a liberating education that would build an individual's character and culture through close engagement

[6] A file of Caro's correspondence is held by the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People, at the National Library of Israel (https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_CAHJP004321415/NLI). Comments on his unpublished correspondence will also be found in Lippmann 1840, and Bloch 1887.

[7] In his later essay, *Tekhunat Ha-Rabbanim* (1820), Caro named Mendelssohn and Campe as advocates of the desired education "of the heart", a phrase reflecting the standard Jewish mussar text by Bahya ibn Paquda, *Duties of the Heart*.

with the natural world,[8] and Caro follows this. For Herder, cultural progress ought not to erase or depart from the distinctive national cultures which shape a healthy individual's formation. Throughout his writing, Caro appears closer to Herder's model of national education than to the less political advocacy of high culture preferred by the Philanthropins, whose models of an educated man Herder came to describe contemptuously as 'geese' (Andress 1916, 148, 222). Caro situated the test of a modern education for Jews in the context of a vital Hebrew culture, whose sources lie in the embodied philosophical language of ancient Hebrew literature and literature, and whose continuing justification lies in the need of Jews to hold themselves up to conversation with a gentile society which desired peaceful relationships with Jews grounded in wisdom and common interest. Though 'Giddul banim' suggests the source of Jewish educational vitality lay in the language of the Bible, that education should take place in the language shared with non-Jews, and in particular that education should be geared to the present reality that Jews and Christians share a political life. Throughout the essay, Caro underlines that man is a political creature, and that education is preparation for political life, or life in society. A primary challenge that must be addressed in a child's education is the fact that they will in life face evil – in the form of their own passions, and in the form of political evils. Education must prepare a person to face conflict and to overcome fear. At school age, therefore, a child should have such experiences which enable them to know their strengths and limitations, and to know that they can and must overcome their fears. It is not possible, he writes, to reach the heavens without knowing nature, in its deepest and its worst forms (Hades). This is the secret, he adds, which explains why Samuel was angry with the young Israelites who wanted a king, it is a secret of the Talmud, and it is a feature of 'the way of the land' (*derekh eretz*), a term encompassing both interpersonal ethics and wider social and political relationships.

3. Politics as a central concern

Caro made education his primary vehicle of activity from the time of the publication of 'Giddul banim', when he first attempted to set up a Jewish elementary school in Posen. Education was also a focus in subsequent publications, but the connection he drew between educational and political fulfilment is evident throughout.

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[8] There is a considerable literature on the relationship between the work of Mendelssohn and that of Herder. For a recent reprisal of this relationship, see Almog 2024.

In 1820, Caro's second major essay appeared, *Brit Emet* (True Covenant).[9] The first part was a counterblast to the traditionalist polemics against the practices introduced in the first reformist synagogue, the Hamburg Temple, which extended to a critique of the reliance on German translations and interpretations of Jewish texts by non-traditionalists (see further in Bleich 1985). Caro took the traditionalists to task for the weakness of their objections to moderate reform of the religious services, and then excoriated the traditionalists for not seeing how much greater were the problems associated with novelties which were accepted in traditionalist communities, lengthening prayer services and encouraging superstitions. The second half of the essay, *Tekhunat Ha--Rabbanim*, presented guidelines for the promotion of rabbis of ethical distinction and public value. In the third of a list of obligations that all rabbis should adopt, Caro discussed the value of wide secular learning, focusing on the political implications of the need for secular learning. "Pick from each of your tribes men who are wise (Deut. 1:13) … for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples ... (Deut. 4:6)".

Proof that this should guide the rabbinate is taken from comments made by Maimonides and Yehuda HaLevi about the qualifications for the members of the Sanhedrin.

> And after that: "Consider, too, that this nation is Your people, that is, a people for the government of which I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Thy actions in governing them". He needs to have knowledge of the language of his land if [he is] to articulate his thoughts to his people, in his instructing them in the ways of justice, and if he is to speak before the ministers and leaders of the state of our Diaspora to improve things for us, and if he is to answer the heretics and opponents, for they are many.

Returning to the duty of Jews to provide education that corresponds to the needs and intellectual capacities of children – a classic theme for modernists writing on Enlightened pedagogy – Caro then gives sources to support his view that core features of biblical and rabbinic Judaism are universal love and a patriotic love of the land in which one lives:

> It is an obligation of the rabbi to preach love of all mankind which is that every man will love all men, regardless of what nation or what religion he will be…
>
> It is an obligation for the rabbi to preach on love of the land in which his people dwell because man is obligated from the time that he enters into a social contract to help his fellow in any way he can, for through this his welfare is attained, for:

[9] The translation given here is that of Micah Lapidus, in Lapidus 2008.

> it is not good for man to be alone. Therefore every man needs to improve the situation of his fellow man. This is achieved by subjugating his will to the will of the monarchy which concerns itself with everything that is necessary for the general good. When war breaks out and the king calls his people to go out to battle, to risk their lives for their land, to stand united as compatriots…
>
> And if each man turns his back to the command of the king, and does not lend his hand to him but rather sought to protect only himself in times of trouble, then solidarity will dissolve and the whole people will be exiled. Verily we too, the children of lsrael, are required to seek the welfare of the land in which we dwell, for we too are a part of the social body, we too eat from the fruit of the land and are satiated from her goodness – upon us too stirs the eye of the monarchy without which we would be plundered, which saves us from all exploitation and violence.

The duties to love all people and to serve and support the wars of the government are so important Caro will return to them again later in the essay, to give more support from classical Jewish sources, and underlining that a failure to serve fully is a cause of anti-Jewish contempt and discrimination.[10]

Caro turns next to the duty of rabbis to judge wisely, arguing that the 613 commandments which rabbinic scholars identify with the laws of the Torah are "for all Israel's observance together, not just one person". These laws should be adjudicated with an eye to the ability of the people to bear the burden of community rulings, since "The aim of our Sages, whether in a political enactment or its annulment, is to establish political peace and order". Judgements should be made by legal scholars with as much specialist knowledge as modern gentile lawyers require, and – as noted by an array of impeccably traditionalist scholars – they should be communicated to non-Jews in a shared language, in the fashion that enabled Menasseh ben Israel and Moses Mendelssohn to reverse decrees against the Jewish community. As a source for this view, Caro refers to the leading German rabbi Menachem Mendel Steinhardt, a member of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin widely known amongst Jewish scholars for his acceptance of moderate reforms: "These are the words of ... the brilliant rabbi and scholar, our teacher and sage, Mendel Steinhardt, the author of the work of [legal] responsa, *Divre Menachem*. Would that all the rabbis of Israel were like him, how we would find favor in the eyes of God and man".

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[10] In Prussian Posen, the desirability of having Jews perform obligatory military service was an issue throughout the 1820s and early 1830s, closely tied to the debate about the admissibility of Jews as citizens (Laubert 1922). Writing half a century earlier, by contrast, Moses Mendelssohn was not satisfied that military service was necessarily encompassed in the duty of Jews as citizens, whose divine mission would by other means help to raise society beyond the condition in which wars were waged so readily by European states. For a recent addition to the literature assessing the nuances of Mendelssohn's attitude to military service, see Weiss 2023, 55-107.

Caro's explanation of the failure (in his eyes) of the European rabbinate to live up to the values of rabbinic Judaism centres on the ignorance and persecution of the Christian Dark Ages (clearly encompassing the whole medieval period). In his description, Caro focuses in particular in the powerful western European states of Germany, England, France and Italy, not mentioning Poland or Russia, for instance. Moral decline within the Jewish community set in as a result of insecurity, dependency and isolation, in support of which Caro cites the analyses of Montesquieu and Maimonides. The path towards the activism of Enlightened German Jews Caro identifies with the scientific and medical knowledge shared by the Jews of Spain, among whom he makes no division between figures of divergent religious and philosophical persuasions. The history of oppression, popular hatred and contempt for Jews has passed now, according to Caro, and now Jews must draw nearer to gentiles "through all forms of attachment so that we may live out the rest of our days peacefully on the land, aware of the goodness of God, and fulfilling His commandments". Jewish communities should reorganise themselves as befits the age in which they can live successfully in a joint society of Jews and Christians, improving their education, the functioning of their charities, and the expectations placed on their rabbis.

If in 1820 Caro still argued so boldly for the case that the old-fashioned hatred of Jews should no longer determine Jewish expectations of social and political relationships, it was not because he believed these had wholly disappeared. German Jews had only recently faced the 'Hep! Hep!' riots. While Caro devoted the next period of his life to the development of a high quality Jewish elementary education that would enable children to enter a secular secondary school in Posen, he retained a caution about how far Jews should be willing to adapt in order to fit the expectations of a still intolerant society. The essay he wrote "Ueber die Würde der Frauen in Israel" ("On the Dignity of Women in Israel") in 1837 casts in clearer light how much Caro saw the reform of religious Judaism as bound up with the reform of European politics and society, still too coloured by anti-Jewish discrimination to justify the more enthusiastic rejection of Jewish communal norms of more radical reformers.

In 1836-37, one such reformer, Abraham Geiger, published an argument for the equal participation of Jewish women in the divine service (Geiger, 1836-37). Caro responded at length with an account of the dignity afforded to women both historically and in contemporary rabbinic Jewish communities, in which he framed Geiger's analysis as an affirmation of the prejudices long held against Jews by European Christians. Women were not discriminated against by Jewish law, but protected by it, and women were not excluded from public worship, but take a part in Sabbath and holiday services without exclusion. Women, he adds, have been willing participants in the exile and

martyrdom to which Jews have been exposed through history, implying that their dignity as Jews was not dependent on forms of worship or on expectations tied to their roles in the domestic sphere. Whereas Geiger charged that women were excluded by prayer books and services written in a language they did not understand, Caro retorted that it was both men and women who were equally disadvantaged – and added that the admittedly outmoded prayer book for women written in Judeo-German *Tz;enah U-Re'enah* "did much good in its time". The problem of poor Jewish education should not be solved by the "absurd" demand that "all Israelites should learn the language of their country". Rather than hasten to give up on the forms accepted in Jewish communities in order to appear progressive in the eyes of gentile moralists, Caro argued that reformers should continue their work with a view to the pressure on Jewish communities in the current political environment:

> Considering the tremendous activity and pressure of Jewish theologians in Germany toward reform, one must truly be concerned about Judaism in both religious and political terms. It has only been a few decades since one heard in Germany from time to time say: The Jew, too, is a human being! It was not so long ago that the HepHeps endangered the lives of the Jews, and the negotiations in the various estates and chambers of Germany, in which accusations against the Jews were brought forward, are still quite recent, and provide plenty of material for contempt and persecution. Jewish theologians already believe they must sing a Hallelujah! – Now is truly not the time to forcibly dissolve the beautiful old association…
>
> Even in France, Holland, and England, where the Jews are completely emancipated and boast great, learned men, even there the violent desire for reform does not exist among our brothers, out of the conviction that in religion, as in politics, every powerful, rapid innovation causes upheaval and significant disadvantages; why, then, should we Germans be an exception? Therefore, dear brothers, hold on until it pleases the German government to make us completely equal to its inhabitants; until it is permitted to form a higher college composed of pious and learned people, which will be authoritative in religious matters, before which you will present your opinions, insights, and reform plans; until our Christian brothers are truly serious about recognizing us as brothers, and the educated and uneducated non-Jew, like the French, will sincerely say: In Germany one does not say: This is a Jew, but this is a German! Truth and unity!

Conclusions

By foregrounding the influence of Idealism on Caro's thought, this article has been able to provide context for characterisations of his widely noted work

on religious reform. Caro did seek a radical reform of rabbinic institutions, synagogue services and educational models. He was radical in his critique of more conservative rabbis and of the superstition and corruption he saw was tolerated in the rabbinic establishment. At the same time, he was also party to communal compromises which reflected a respect for the best values of Polish Judaism, as well as a commitment to the collective welfare of the Jewish community. He was extremely aware of the impact of the community's vulnerability on its moral standing, and he saw the roots of this lay in the historic ignorance and discrimination of the dominant political culture. In some respects, the Jewish community of Posen was more insecure than its counterparts in Lemberg, or Berlin, and religious, cultural and educational reform were less well supported because of this. Nevertheless, Caro, persuaded of the value of a cultural regeneration which embraced real communities beyond the most narrow circles engaged in high culture, found strengths in Posen's Jewish community which he missed in the visions of competing intellectual camps in Germany. He found the protagonists and opponents of a reform centred on rabbinic authority at the same time to lack practicality and to lack the ingredients for a fuller cultural vitality, and in expressing this revealed his commitment to the sources of national revitalisation otherwise most naturally identified with Herder's work.

Caro's amalgam of classical Jewish moralistic and modern Enlightened and Idealist agendas merits further attention. As Caro did not found an intellectual movement or a rabbinic institution, he has appeared at the margins of scholarly work on modern Jewish cultural history. As a prolific polemicist and a correspondent who engaged with peers across German-speaking lands, his influence may be seen in the manner in which he mediated the philosophical agendas of Idealist thinkers for different parts of the Jewish community. His writing did inspire other Jewish educationalists elsewhere in Poland and Germany (see, e.g., Sinkoff 2020, esp. 261). Further comparative study may cast light on the development of philosophical interests and methods among thinkers who, like Caro, were more concerned to foster broad cultural change and promote public virtues in practice than to advance a discrete intellectual initiative in competition with contemporaries of opposing persuasions.

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