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CONSTRUCTING A GERMAN-JEWISH HEIMAT: BERTHOLD
ROSENTHAL'S *HEIMAT HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF BADEN*

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MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

Constructing a German-Jewish Heimat:
Berthold Rosenthal's Heimat History of the Jews of Baden

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Abstract

This paper examines how the historian Berthold Rosenthal (1875–1957) mobilized the idea of Heimat to address the challenges of being both German and Jewish during the Weimar Republic. By conceiving of the Jewish communities of Baden as a Heimat, Rosenthal put a novel twist on the traditional definition of Heimat as a purely geographic entity. The literal construction of a German-Jewish Heimat identity, out of diverse regional communities, allowed Rosenthal not only to emphasize the Germanness of Baden's Jews, but also to call attention to the ways that Jews constituted a unique and coherent community within the German nation. This appropriation of Heimat discourse served to show how German Jews could be proud Germans and Jews at one and the same time. That Rosenthal could use the language of the Heimat movement to articulate his anxieties about Jewish identity indicates that the problem of "provincialism"—whether conceived in regional, religious or class terms—was widespread in early twentieth-century Germany. Rosenthal's notion of a German-Jewish Heimat suggests that the struggle to forge multicultural identities is not a phenomenon unique to our post-modern age, but rather the twentieth century's *Eigenart*.

Keywords

German History, German Jews, Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Historiography

Introduction

Shortly after the 1927 publication of his magnum opus, the *Heimat History of the Jews of Baden*, the historian Berthold Rosenthal received a congratulatory letter from the Association for the Upbringing of Jewish Orphans in Baden. The letter thanked Rosenthal for praising the Association's work in his book, which chronicled the history of Baden's Jewish communities from Roman times until the present. "We would like to take this opportunity to tell you that we highly value the message of your book," the Association wrote, "and that we have resolved to present our charges with a copy on such occasions as Bar Mitzvahs, etc."¹ This sentiment seems unremarkable until one first opens Rosenthal's book. Despite the critical praise the *Heimat History* received in the German press, it is difficult to imagine any 13-year-old slogging through the narrowly-printed, 457-page tome. That the Association considered the *Heimat History* a suitable Bar Mitzvah gift indicates more about the book's status as a cultural artifact than its actual readership. As anyone who has received a book for his Bar Mitzvah knows, the value of such gifts is largely symbolic; they represent the values a community shares and wishes to perpetuate, regardless whether anyone reads them. In all likelihood, the most these Jewish orphans would ever discern about the *Heimat History* was its gold-stamped title and the cover illustration, which depicted a Star of David set within the Badenese coat of arms.

What was it about the book's title that lent it such fetish value? Germans often use the word "Heimat," which can be translated roughly as "hometown" or "homeland," to signify their sentimental attachment to a particular geographic locality. Proponents of the so-called Heimat movement, which included everything from historical societies to town beautification campaigns, celebrated the unique character of the German provinces while simultaneously affirming their membership in a national community. Given this pre-existing discourse, it is surprising to find "Heimat" in the title of a book on German-Jewish history. What did the invocation of Heimat enable Rosenthal to say about the cultural position of Jews in Germany that the bare recitation of facts could not?

In this paper, I examine how Rosenthal mobilized the idea of Heimat to address the challenges of being both German and Jewish during the Weimar Republic. By conceiving of the Jewish communities of Baden as a Heimat, Rosenthal put a novel twist on the traditional definition of Heimat as a purely geographic entity. The literal *construction* of a German-Jewish Heimat identity, out of diverse regional communities, allowed Rosenthal not only to emphasize the Germanness of Baden's Jews, but also to call attention to the ways that Jews constituted a unique and coherent community within the German nation. This appropriation of Heimat discourse served to show how German Jews could be proud Germans and Jews at one and the same time.

Although his *Heimat History* has become particularly valuable to historians since the 1930s and 1940s, when most of the original Jewish community records in Baden were destroyed by the Nazis, Rosenthal ranks as a relatively minor figure compared to the other Jewish historians of his day. He has been the subject of a few short biographical entries, but no one has examined his work in the context of Weimar culture and historiography.² The Jewish family trees he compiled, now part of his collection at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, have probably received more attention than his historical writing.³ Rosenthal's work can shed light on the cultural climate of Weimar Germany because of, rather than in spite of, his modest stature as a scholar. As a marginal figure in the German cultural scene, Rosenthal provides us with a down-to-earth perspective on the identity politics so endemic to this period.

¹ *Der Vorstand des Landesvereins zur Erziehung israelitischer Waisen in Baden* to Berthold Rosenthal, December 21, 1927. Berthold Rosenthal Collection, VII/6. Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

² See Uri R. Kaufmann, "Rosenthal, Berthold: Lehrer, Historiker," in *Badische Biographien*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1990), 25–27; Karl Otto Watzinger, "Rosenthal, Berthold," in *Geschichte der Juden in Mannheim 1650–1945* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1984), 32–33; Guido Kisch, "Berthold Rosenthal," in *Forschungen zur Rechts-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden*, vol. 2 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1979), 441.

³ See Claus W. Hirsch, "The Berthold Rosenthal Archives," *Stammbaum* 1, no. 1 (1992/93): 3.

The Uses of Heimat

Berthold Rosenthal was born in 1875 in the town of Liedolsheim near Karlsruhe. In the short memoir that his wife, Johanna, wrote about their life together, she attributed her husband's life-long interest in Heimat and Jewish history to his traditional upbringing in this rural community.⁴ Rosenthal's father could trace the family line in Liedolsheim back to the early eighteenth century; his mother came from Ingenheim in the neighboring Pfalz. As a child, Rosenthal assisted his father with his cattle-dealing business and worked in his mother's vegetable garden. He attended the local *Volksschule* where, since the mid-1870s, children of all religious denominations were taught in the same classroom; only during compulsory religious instruction were the students separated. Rosenthal was particularly proud that Baden was one of the first German states to adopt the so-called *Simultanschule*, which he believed contributed to the low incidence of anti-Semitism.

Like many men of his generation, Rosenthal left his small community to pursue his education and career in regional cities. He attended the *Praeparandenschule* in Tauberbischofsheim from 1889 to 1891, followed by the teachers' college in Karlsruhe until 1894. His first job was as a religious teacher and prayer leader in the Jewish community of Basel. After passing his second state exam he was transferred to Mannheim, where he was appointed senior teacher at the local secondary school. Rosenthal lost his teaching post when Jews were dismissed from the civil service in 1933, and was forced to support his family by researching Jewish genealogies on commission. Soon he was no longer even permitted to lecture publicly on the history of Jews in Baden.⁵ Rosenthal and his wife narrowly escaped deportation to the Gurs concentration camp by emigrating to the United States in 1940. They settled in Omaha, Nebraska, where Rosenthal died in 1957.

Voluntary associations were the focus of much of Rosenthal's intellectual and social life outside the classroom. For several years he served as secretary of both *Die neue Volksschulwarte*, a pedagogical journal, as well as the Mannheim chapter of the Bnei Briss order, the *August Lamey Loge*. Rosenthal was a prominent member of two associations of Jewish teachers in Baden, the *Israelitischer Lehrerverein* and the *Naphtali Epstein Verein*. In the mid-1920s Rosenthal joined a local historical society, the *Mannheimer Altertumsverein*, where he served as an active member until his membership was revoked in 1934.⁶

In addition to the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal published a variety of articles on Jewish history and education. His work appeared in local and national Jewish newspapers (the Mannheim *Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt*, the *Jüdische liberale Zeitung*, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* and the *C.V. Zeitung*), general interest newspapers (the *Frankfurter Zeitung*), as well as in academic journals (the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, the *Mannheimer Geschichtsblätter*, the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*). During the 1930s, Rosenthal contributed entries to the *Germania Judaica*, a multi-volume encyclopedia that aimed to cover the history of Germany's Jewish communities.

Given Rosenthal's long-standing interest in history and pedagogy, his decision to include a word like "Heimat" in the title of his book cannot have been uninformed. Thus it is all the more surprising when he used "Heimat" in defiance of the accepted conventions. The historian Raphael Straus, reviewing the *Heimat History* for the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, expressed unease with Rosenthal's characterization of his scholarly work as a *Heimatgeschichte*. "The

⁴ The following biographical details are drawn, unless otherwise indicated, from the memoir written by Johanna Rosenthal, "Einiges aus unserm gemeinsamen Leben: Berthold Rosenthal und Johanna, gb. Benzian, 9. Juli 1914 – 16. Dezember 1957." Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

⁵ A 1935 letter from the Heidelberg chapter of the *Reichsverband jüdischer Frontsoldaten* informed Rosenthal that the Gestapo had prohibited his planned lecture on the topic of "Jewish Genealogy": "It is not permitted in the near future to discuss topics that concern the Jewish attachment to Heimat (*Heimatverbundenheit*), the encouragement for Jews to remain therein, or the aspiration for a new emancipation. Thus we must unfortunately do without your lecture on the 31st." *RJF* to Berthold Rosenthal, March 17, 1935. Berthold Rosenthal Collection, VII/4/7.

⁶ Christoph Popp, *Der Mannheimer Altertumsverein, 1859–1949: Regionale Forschungen, Sozialstruktur und Geschichtsbild eines Historischen Vereins* (Mannheim: Palatium Verlag, 1996), 130.

author did not have a purely scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) goal in mind,” he declared. “The book’s shortcomings... can be explained by the unfortunate combination of scientific and popular genres.” Straus believed that “Heimat” was grammatically unsuited to describe either the state of Baden or its Jewish population:

One can write a “Heimat history” only about a “Heimat,” i.e. a spatially comprehended, narrowly defined area, but not about a politically demarcated and moreover broad area, and even less about a population group... This unusual title clearly does not describe the content of the book so much as its purpose. The didactic objective of the author thereby comes to expression already in the title of the book.⁷

To call the book a “Heimat” history, he argued, was to destabilize the very meaning of the word: Jews did not constitute a “spatially comprehended, narrowly defined area” any more than the state of Baden, whose borders had been politically—rather than geographically—defined. Straus believed that Rosenthal’s use of the word hinted at a deeper disjunction between the the book’s “didactic” purpose and its scholarly content.

But what was Rosenthal trying to teach his readership? What non-scholarly agenda was the book designed to serve? Straus is oddly silent on this matter—perhaps he was too confused by Rosenthal’s usage of “Heimat” to venture a guess. Taking Straus’s cognitive dissonance as my starting point, my task in this paper will be to analyze the motivations that lay behind the writing of Rosenthal’s *Heimat History*. I will examine his use of the word “Heimat” and the cultural dynamics of Baden’s Jewish community during the Weimar Republic in the hope of elucidating the book’s “didactic objective.”

This evidence leads us to construe Rosenthal’s didacticism quite literally. In the following sections, I will show how he envisaged the *Heimat History* as a religious textbook that would address contemporary anxieties about German-Jewish identity. Many Jews in Baden believed that anti-Semitism and assimilation had destabilized their sense of cultural identity. They felt the increasing need to demonstrate their Germanness while at the same time worrying that intermarriage, conversion and demographic pressure had eroded the foundations of Jewish life. Rosenthal’s depiction of Badenese Jewry as a cohesive, coherent community with a thousand-year shared history served to impress upon Jewish children the need to preserve their Jewish identity in the face of forces that might encourage them to abandon their Judaism completely.

Rosenthal was one of many Jewish authors to invoke the long history of Jewish settlement in Germany. Historians of German Jewry have typically interpreted this discourse of “rootedness” as a defensive posture against rising anti-Semitism. According to Paul Mendes-Flohr, “the claim that the Jews were as indigenous to Germany as their non-Jewish neighbors became a common refrain of Weimar Jewry in its efforts to counter those who would question its allegiance to the *Vaterland*.”⁸ For many Jews, this affirmation of German identity entailed a rejection of Zionism, which posited a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. In her study of German-Jewish memoirs, Miriam Gebhardt interprets the authors’ repeated invocation of *Seßhaftigkeit* (“settledness”) as an oath of political loyalty towards the Reich: “Their century-long settledness in Germany is a clear statement against the Jewish national idea, which was rejected by the majority of the German bourgeoisie.”⁹

A close-reading of Rosenthal’s use of “Heimat” shows that these defensive strategies, while prominent in the *Heimat History*, constituted only part of the book’s project. As I shall argue, Rosenthal’s notion of a German-Jewish Heimat enabled Jews to preserve a sense of cultural *Eigenart* (“distinctiveness”) while affirming their political solidarity with the German nation. We should

⁷ Raphael Straus, review of *Heimat History of the Jews of Baden*, by Berthold Rosenthal, in *Zeitschrift der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 2 (1929): 168.

⁸ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vol. 4, *Renewal and Destruction, 1918–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 157.

⁹ Miriam Gebhardt, *Das Familiengedächtnis: Erinnerung im deutsch-jüdischen Bürgertum 1890 bis 1932* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999), 74.

understand Rosenthal's book not merely as a reactive defense against anti-Semitism, as Mendes-Flohr and Gebhardt might contend, but also—and perhaps more fundamentally—as an attempt to construct a sense of German-Jewish identity.

Although Straus was uncomfortable with the idea of a Jewish *Heimat* history, I would argue that Rosenthal's invocation of "Heimat" actually had much in common with the word's traditional usage. As a keyword in German cultural discourse, *Heimat* was especially suited for emphasizing a group's distinctiveness while affirming its membership in a larger national community. Here I am following the work of Celia Applegate and Alon Confino, who have written extensively on the history of the *Heimat* movement in Germany.¹⁰ Applegate and Confino both view the *Heimat* movement as instrumental in forging a national identity out of diverse, regional affiliations. The inhabitants of the Pfalz and Württemberg—the subjects of Applegate and Confino's studies—made the cognitive leap from local to national identity through "a persistent belief that the abstraction of the nation must be experienced through one's common appreciation of a locality, a *Heimat*."¹¹ The *Heimat* movement asserted that German patriotism could be demonstrated through devotion to the place one called home. This equation allowed provincial Germans to affirm their national identity while working to preserve those elements of the provincial experience—such as the unspoiled landscape and coherent communal life—that industrialization and modernization threatened. Proponents of the *Heimat* movement believed that local values could be reconciled with the demands of national solidarity in the same way that factory chimneys and scenic hillsides could co-exist in a postcard image.¹² This rich and complex idea of *Heimat*, where modernity and tradition were seamlessly joined, was constructed "from below" by provincial Germans as a way of coming to terms with an age of dramatic social and political change.

Like the *Heimat* movement in general, the *Heimat History of the Jews of Baden* was motivated by the desire to preserve a group's distinctive values while accepting the assimilation necessary for creating a national community. Rosenthal departed from the traditional geographic definition of *Heimat* by conceiving of the local Jewish community as a *Heimat* to which Baden's Jews could always return, no matter how "German" their national identification. This compromise solution, however disorienting, was a unique way of coming to terms with the challenges of being both German and Jewish at once.

The Practice of Local History

In the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal put the genre of local historiography to the task of constructing a German-Jewish *Heimat* identity. So that we might better understand the tools at his disposal, I will briefly survey the context of German-Jewish historiography during the 1920s and 1930s, focusing especially on local and regional history. Jewish historiography in Weimar Germany has been the subject of many essays and books, the majority of which concern the development of universal history, the attempt to tell the history of world Jewry from its biblical origins to the present day.¹³ The short years of the Weimar Republic witnessed the publication of two German encyclopedias, the *Jüdisches Lexicon* and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, the German translation of Simon Dubnow's ten-volume *World History of the Jewish People*, as well as the first installment of Ismar Elbogen's projected twelve-volume, multi-author history of the Jews. The size and cost of these editions indicate the extent to which universal history captured the imagination of German-Jewish historians. But by

¹⁰ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹¹ Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*, 15.

¹² Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 205.

¹³ See Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Michael Brenner, "An Unknown Project of a World Jewish History in Weimar Germany," *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 249–67; Christhard Hoffmann, "Jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland: 1918–1938. Konzepte, Schwerpunkte, Ergebnisse," in *Wissenschaft des Judentums: Anfänge der Judaistik in Europa*, ed. Julius Carlebach (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 135–52.

focusing almost exclusively on universal history, contemporary scholars have often neglected the extensive field of local and regional Jewish history. Not only did these books provide important source material for the multi-volume works written by historians like Dubnow and Elbogen, but they also constituted an important expression of local Jewish identity.

Histories of individual German-Jewish communities had been written for nearly a century before Rosenthal's *Heimat History*. This was traditionally the occupation of local rabbis, who saw it as part of their duty to record the history of the communities in which they served.¹⁴ The process by which rabbis were ordained in imperial Germany further encouraged the production of local Jewish history. The state required candidates for the rabbinate to obtain a joint degree from a secular university—the result was that many rabbis found themselves holding a Ph.D. in addition to the *smicha*. Jewish history was a natural choice of university study for those who wished to become rabbis. In spite of the prominence accorded to such universal historians as Dubnow and Elbogen, the majority of university scholarship was devoted to local community life. Of the 32 dissertations written on German-Jewish history between 1918 and 1933, 23 dealt with local or regional topics.¹⁵

Local German-Jewish historiography had acquired a mixed reputation by the 1920s, due at least in part to its antiquarian tendencies. Many of these local histories were concerned primarily with collecting facts and figures—such as demographic statistics and gravestone inscriptions—without addressing themes of wider significance. Even journals that published local history felt obligated to encourage their contributors to tackle topics that resonated beyond the local level. In its inaugural issue, the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* vowed “not to get bogged down in microhistory (*Kleingeschichte*), but rather to keep sight of the big picture at all times.”¹⁶

Rosenthal's *Heimat History* displays the influence of both universal and local styles of historiography. Both of the major historians in Baden before Rosenthal, Leopold Löwenstein and Adolph Lewin, were local rabbis in addition to amateur historians. The temporal and spatial scope of Rosenthal's book far exceeds that of his predecessors, even though he was equally prone to including extraneous detail. Löwenstein wrote monographs on the history of Jews in the Kurpfalz and Baden-Durlach, two principalities that would later be entirely or partially incorporated into the state of Baden.¹⁷ Taking a more comprehensive view, Adolf Lewin chose to write the history of the Jews in Baden through the narrative of the state. His *History of the Jews in Baden since the Reign of Karl Frederick* (1909) surveyed the history of local Jewish communities and legal emancipation in Baden since 1738. Whereas Lewin chronicled the history of Jews in the state of Baden, Rosenthal wanted to encompass the entire history of Jewish settlement in the *lands* that would become Baden. We can already detect an important difference between Lewin and Rosenthal's historiography: Lewin gave priority to the state as organizing motif, while Rosenthal's narrative emphasized the formation of the state of Baden around prior-existing Jewish communities.

Rosenthal's task was made more complicated by the fact that Baden was a conglomeration of approximately 20 royal territories and over 100 imperial noble estates, united in 1806 following Napoleon's victories. Up until the unification of Baden, Jews were often subject to different laws and restrictions depending on where they lived. Löwenstein commented on these challenges in the foreword to his *History of the Jews in the Kurpfalz*. While writing the book, Löwenstein despaired of finding a “system” to tell the history of medieval Jewry:

The characteristic of this system is its unsystematic nature, the mercurial mood with which the Jews were treated by prince and people alike. The Jews are expelled only to be benevolently readmitted; in one territory they are placed on equal footing with the citizens, while elsewhere heaven and earth is moved to prevent them from practicing a respectable trade or useful

¹⁴ Monika Richarz, “Probleme der heutigen Lokal- und Regionalforschung zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden,” *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* 1 (1987): 9.

¹⁵ Christhard Hoffmann, “Jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland,” 134–35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁷ See Leopold Löwenstein, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, vol. 1, *Geschichte der Juden in der Kurpfalz*; vol. 2, *Nathanael Weil, Oberlandrabbiner in Karlsruhe und seine Familie* (Frankfurt a.M.: J. Kauffmann, 1895–98).

occupation. The difficulty of a pragmatic approach to writing history under such circumstances should be obvious.¹⁸

Rosenthal sought to overcome this difficulty through the thematic and chronological structure of his book. In the first chapter, Rosenthal discussed the first Jewish communities in the Roman cities of the Rhineland, the reign of Charlemagne and his successors, and concluded with the pogroms that accompanied the first Crusade. The second chapter, which followed the history of Jews up until 1500, could best be described as a *Leidensgeschichte* (“history of suffering”), detailing the various pogroms and accusations of ritual murder inflicted upon Jews in these territories, their expulsion from normal professions and consignment to peddling and money-lending. The period up until 1500 was illustrated through local examples of general trends (*Gesambilder* or *Querschnitte*) that affected Jews in German lands, since Rosenthal found it practical to examine the politics of Jewish life in individual territories starting only in the sixteenth century.¹⁹

In the third and fourth chapters, Rosenthal abandoned *Gesambilder* in favor of detailing the individual development of Jewish life in the larger principalities of Baden, such as the Kurpfalz, Mainz, Speyer, Baden-Baden and Baden-Durlach. Together these chapters cover the period from 1500 until 1809. Each sub-section was based on the same template: Rosenthal examines the first evidence of Jewish settlement in these territories, discussed the privileges or penalties accorded to Jews, and identified the community leaders and institutions. As befits this patchwork pattern of jurisdiction, the exact legal situation of the Jews varied from one territory to the next, but it usually differs only by a matter of degree and not kind.

The fifth chapter began with the creation of Baden out of independent principalities, following Napoleon’s conquest. This chapter ushered in the era of the emancipation of the Jews, and Rosenthal followed the changing debates and legal conditions until 1862, when full emancipation was achieved. The Badenese constitution of 1807 declared that Jews were to be “constitutionally tolerated” and permitted to serve in the civil service. In a succession of edicts that were passed in the following two years, Jews were permitted to own property and marry freely, made eligible for military service, and encouraged to pursue “Christian professions.” These laws did not place Baden’s Jews on a completely equal level with their Christian neighbors, but they did constitute the most progressive effort at emancipation heretofore passed by a German state. The constitution also created the Jewish *Oberrat der Israeliten in Baden*, a supreme council of Jewish communities modeled on the French *sanhedrin*. This precocious effort at emancipation led Rosenthal to call Baden on many occasions a “paradigm of a liberal state” (*ein liberales Musterland*).²⁰

Rosenthal went into great detail when describing the process of emancipation, often quoting at length from the text of laws or parliamentary debates. The sixth and final chapter described the internal developments of Jewish community life in the nineteenth century: the emergence of reform Judaism, the creation of the *Oberrat*, and the changes that affected the community during unification, World War I and its aftermath.

The Construction of a German-Jewish Heimat

In his effort to weave a coherent narrative out of a millennium’s worth of history, Rosenthal faced the challenge of demonstrating the internal coherence of Baden’s Jewry. What experience did the Jews of these territories have in common that made them an appropriate subject for a single work of history? Did the identity of Baden’s Jews remain constant over time, and how did it respond to the influences of the emerging German state? The invocation of *Heimat*, a local community with affective ties to the nation state, provided Rosenthal with a framework for conceptualizing German-Jewish identity in Baden. The provincial Jewish communities of Baden constituted for Rosenthal a single *Heimat*, where Jews could celebrate their distinctiveness while affirming their ties to the German nation. We can

¹⁸ Löwenstein, *Geschichte der Juden in der Kurpfalz*, vi.

¹⁹ Rosenthal commented upon this organizational strategy in the foreword to the book. Berthold Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden* (Bühl: Konkordia A.G., 1927), iv.

²⁰ For a condensed history of Jewish emancipation in Baden, see Franz Hundsnurscher and Gerhard Taddey, *Die jüdischen Gemeinden in Baden: Denkmale, Geschichte, Schicksale* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1968), 10–17.

observe Rosenthal's construction of a German-Jewish Heimat identity by following his use of the words *Heimat*, *Vaterland* ("fatherland") and *Eigenart* ("distinctiveness") in the *Heimat History* and related publications.

Let us first consider his attempt to construct a national identity for Baden's Jews. In the final chapter of the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal indicated that the rising tide of racial anti-Semitism had made the Germanness of German Jews an increasingly contested topic. The *völkisch* mentality maintained that German Jews were un-assimilated foreigners who lacked any deep attachment to the German nation: "This most dangerous variety of hatred towards Jews, built on the shifting soil of science and increasingly disseminated in the following centuries, seeks to prove that Jews are foreigners (*Fremdlinge*) who cannot recognize Germany as their fatherland, and thus have no right to exist (*keine Daseinsberechtigung*) here."²¹ Given this existential threat, it makes sense to interpret Rosenthal's book at least in part as an attempt to refute this charge through historical scholarship. If Jews could prove their ancestors had lived on Badenese soil for centuries, then they could show themselves to be not *Fremdlinge* but rather *heimisch* ("local"), and thus capable of recognizing Germany as their fatherland.

Rosenthal's hidden premise was that the condition of being local attested to one's national identity. He employed this mode of argumentation more explicitly in a 1929 article entitled "The Heimat Right of the Jews of Baden," published in the *C.-V.-Kalender*.²² A condensed version of the *Heimat History*, the article attempted to prove that Jews had lived on Badenese soil since at least the thirteenth century. Rosenthal argued that Jews could dispel their stereotype as foreigners by demonstrating their historical attachment to the land: "Especially at the present time, when it is fashionable in ardent *völkisch* circles—among non-Jews as well as within our own ranks—to view Jews as foreigners tolerated by local people (*Wirtsvolk*), it is appropriate to investigate how long Jews have lived in our narrower (*engerer*) Heimat, and how they gradually settled in the various parts of the land."²³ Just as a Badener might display his German patriotism by demonstrating his attachment to the local *Heimat*, Rosenthal tried to show that Jews were metaphorically "local" to Germany by demonstrating their rootedness in Baden; the *völkisch* dichotomy of Jews versus "local people" (*Wirtsvolk*) was thereby shown to be historically unfounded.

It is important to note that Rosenthal's remarks were directed as much at Jews "within our own ranks" as non-Jews. Rosenthal suggested that Zionists provided fodder for anti-Semites who questioned Jewish patriotism. The subject of Zionism was treated more favorably in the final paragraph of the *Heimat History*, where Rosenthal marveled at the Jewish achievement in settling Palestine; nonetheless, he asserted that the majority of German Jews would choose to remain "in the old Heimat." As encouragement to those who stay, Rosenthal quotes the prophet Jeremiah's call to "build houses and inhabit them, plant gardens and enjoy their fruit."²⁴ In this context, the invocation of *Seßhaftigkeit* serves to locate the German-Jewish Heimat not in far-off Palestine but somewhere within the borders of the Reich.

Rosenthal frequently conflated Baden and Germany when referring to the idea of Heimat. In the second chapter of the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal invoked the notion of Heimat to characterize the consciousness of medieval Rhineland Jews:

Despite all the sorrows and deprivations, Jews were filled with the natural need to view this land—where the bones of their fathers rested, to which their existence was bound by thousands of ties, valuable despite painful memories and experiences—as their

²¹ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, 378.

²² Berthold Rosenthal, "Das Heimatrecht der badischen Juden," *C.-V.-Kalender* (1929). Berthold Rosenthal Collection, I/B/a2. The *C.V. Kalender* was published by the Baden chapter of the *Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, an organization that sought to combat anti-Semitism in Germany.

²³ Rosenthal, "Das Heimatrecht der Badischen Juden," 21.

²⁴ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, 457.

fatherland. *Germany was their Heimat*, and they endeavored to attain a friendly relationship with their fellow residents of other religions [italics are mine].²⁵

The conflation of local and national conceptions of Heimat in the second sentence is particularly revealing. Rosenthal aspired to write the Heimat history of the Jews of Baden, yet he asserted that these same Jews regarded *Germany*—which did not even exist as a political entity in the middle ages—as their Heimat. The rhetorical character of the passage is further heightened through the clichéd imagery: Heimat is the place where “the bones of their fathers rested,” to which “their existence was bound by thousands of ties,” sentiments calculated to appeal to the heart more than the mind.

The location of a Jewish Heimat was expressed with equal ambiguity towards the end of the *Heimat History*, where Rosenthal described the participation of Baden’s Jews in World War I. “At the close of a victorious war, the Jews of Baden—especially those who had fought in battle, received honors, or sealed their allegiance to the Heimat with their blood—believed that the time of animosity towards Jews was forever past.”²⁶ As it turned out, Jewish valor did nothing to forestall the accusations of shirking or disloyalty. But what exactly had these Jewish soldiers been fighting for? Was the Heimat for which they shed their blood the land of Baden or the German nation? The fact that Baden and Germany could be used interchangeably in this context suggested that politics—rather than semantic “rootedness”—determined where Heimat is to be found.

As these examples illustrate, Rosenthal used “Heimat” to underscore the connection between local Jewish life and national affiliation. This use of the word does not, however, capture the full complexities of Rosenthal’s Heimat discourse. There were many instances where Rosenthal used “Heimat” not to emphasize the Germanness of Baden’s Jews, but to accentuate the unique character of Jewish life. These two different connotations of “Heimat” were not irreconcilable; in fact, I would argue that Rosenthal combined them in a way that was consistent with the broader German discourse of Heimat.

The very first paragraph of Rosenthal’s book presents us with a conception of Heimat that is not equated—metaphorically or otherwise—with the German nation. Here Rosenthal described the belated interest in Heimat studies (*Heimatkunde*) among German Jews:

Whoever loves Heimat and *Stammesart* and wants to cultivate them, must also know how they have developed and how their distinctive qualities (*Besonderheiten*) are rooted in nature and history. It is also the case among Jews that the desire to learn more about the past of one’s ancestors on native soil (*auf Heimatlicher Scholle*) has been recently awoken.²⁷

The connotations of the German word *Stammesart* are difficult to capture with a single English word. In an anthropological context, *Stamm* literally means “family” or “clan.” In Rosenthal’s day, German historians often used it to refer to the different ethnic groups (such as the *Alemannen*) that settled in Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire.²⁸ One might therefore crudely translate *Stammesart* as “tribal character,” the qualities that distinguish one ethnically defined group from another. However one translates it, the word’s *völkisch* connotations of racial essentialism cannot be avoided.

The passage suggests that the study of Heimat and *Stammesart* are naturally conjoined. This seems like an unusual claim, since “Heimat” signifies a physical location while *Stammesart* refers to the characteristics of an ethnic or cultural group. Raphael Straus noted the same apparent confusion in his review of the *Heimat History*. I believe that the key similarity between Heimat and *Stammesart* lies in the fact that they both possess distinctive qualities or *Besonderheiten*. By definition, each Heimat is

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

²⁶ Ibid., 377.

²⁷ Ibid., iii.

²⁸ I am grateful to Volker Menze for bringing this to my attention.

unique: its peculiar combination of landscape, culture and customs make it different from every other Heimat. Similarly, each ethnic or cultural group is distinguished from every other one by its *Stammesart*. The implication of the passage is that the study of Heimat is associated with the search for those characteristics that make a group distinctive or unique. In the case of Jews, Rosenthal suggested, the cultivation of *Heimatkunde* entailed discovering, as a group, “how they have developed and how their distinctive qualities are rooted in nature and history.”

We can observe this association of Heimat and Jewishness in Rosenthal’s descriptions of pre-emancipation Jewish communities in Baden. Describing the community of Gailingen in the early nineteenth century, he suggested that Heimat was the property of Jews regardless where they lived or who their non-Jewish neighbors were:

The large size of the community encouraged not only the preservation of inherited traditions (e.g. the celebration of Purim), but also produced Heimat pride (*Heimatstolz*), a strong Jewish consciousness, and the readiness to defend themselves against injustice from the population and to repel attacks with determination.²⁹

If we compare this invocation of Heimat with Rosenthal’s earlier description of Jewish participation in World War I, we observe two completely different connotations of Heimat. In the latter passage, he asserted that Jews demonstrated their “attachment to Heimat” by fighting alongside non-Jewish Germans against a common national enemy. But in the passage cited above, the Jewish experience of Heimat appears to be independent of any German national consciousness. Rosenthal interpreted the *Heimatstolz* of Gailingen’s Jewish community as a function of its size—the larger the population, the more easily it could preserve traditional forms of life, which in turn fostered Jewish consciousness and *Heimatstolz*. It was this feeling of communal integrity which enabled Jews to “defend themselves against injustice from the population and to repel attacks with determination.”

It seems to me that “Heimat” in this context has nothing to do with political territories like Baden or Germany. If “Heimat” referred to a space inhabited by Jews and non-Jews alike, then how could Gailingen’s Jews demonstrate their *Heimatstolz* by driving attackers from it? “Heimat” must instead refer to the Jewish community as embedded in the local landscape; it is a space that exists only for the Jews of Gailingen and not their Christian neighbors. Although the precise nature of this Jewish Heimat was still undefined, its invocation served to emphasize the coherency and distinctiveness of Jewish identity.

Rosenthal frequently used the word *Eigenart* to characterize the distinctiveness of Jewish identity in Germany. He invoked the distinctiveness of Jewish culture at historical moments when assimilation threatened the integrity of Judaism as a traditional form of life. Rosenthal criticized one of the early emancipatory laws that expected full assimilation in exchange for equal rights: “The whole intention of the edict was that the Jews give up their inherited individuality (*Eigenart*).”³⁰ As much as he lauded the process of emancipation that forms the book’s narrative, Rosenthal argued on occasion that assimilation—and not anti-Semitism—posed the greatest danger to Jewish existence. “Despite the presently clouded skies,” Rosenthal writes in the book’s penultimate paragraph, the Jews of Baden should not lose their confidence in the future:

Israel was never forsaken as long as it did not give itself up! This will for preservation has survived through centuries of persecution and legal deprivation. It will continue to be a conservationary force, even if equal rights have created new relationships, so long as all participating groups feel obligated to instill this will in the coming generation. And this will for the preservation of individuality (*Eigenart*) will enable Jewish Germans to fulfill their duties at any time, and to share in the spiritual and economic efforts of the land

²⁹ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, 164.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

where the bones of their fathers have rested for centuries, and with whose fortune they are inextricably bound.³¹

Here we see Rosenthal appealing to both senses of Jewish Heimat identity, the local and the national, at the same time: Jews must maintain their sense of individuality even in the face of assimilation, and it is this individuality that will enable them to serve their country with distinction. One should note his reference to “Jewish Germans” (*jüdische Deutsche*) a turn of phrase that emphasized the Jewish properties of a German identity.

In these close readings of Rosenthal’s use of “Heimat,” I have examined how Rosenthal appropriated the traditional local/national dichotomy of Heimat discourse to describe the relation between Jews and the German nation. The condition of being both Jewish and German, Rosenthal implied, was analogous to that of being both provincial and national. Rosenthal elaborated this analogy while discussing the life of August Lamey, Baden’s secretary of the interior in the mid-nineteenth century, whose liberal reforms in the 1850s and 1860s were essential for the emancipation of the Jews. After his retirement from service, Lamey was named chief adviser on the affairs of Alsace-Lorraine, shortly after the province had been acquired by the Reich following the Franco-Prussian War. Rosenthal paraphrased Lamey’s strategy for dealing with cultural assimilation in the annexed province:

If we want to make Alsace-Lorraine German again, we should not entrust the task to legislative authorities, but rather to a true and honest administration, which would cultivate and form the German spirit according to its individuality (*Eigenart*) and unique character in the South, rather than the template of the North.³²

It is telling that Rosenthal described the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine, a province whose German identity was contested, in terms of their *Eigenart*. Lamey’s wisdom in Alsace-Lorraine, we might infer, was the product of his experience of Jewish emancipation in Baden: he recognized that there was not one “template” for Germanness, but rather a variety of different ways of being German that had to be cultivated in order to create a national community. Whether one was Alsatian or Jewish, the most effective way of “becoming national” was by celebrating the German values that were consistent with the distinct character of the sub-national community.

The Crisis of German-Jewish Identity in Weimar Germany

Rosenthal’s notion of a German-Jewish Heimat proposed, in a novel fashion, that German Jews could affirm their German nationality without sacrificing their Jewish identity. But for whom did Rosenthal intend this message? Was his *Heimat History* written for a Jewish or non-Jewish German audience? Judging from the favorable reviews in several Christian and non-denominational newspapers, such as the *Oberrheinisches Pastoralblatt* (Freiburg), the *Mannheimer Geschichtsblätter*, *Die Quelle* (Heidelberg), the *Literarische Rundschau für den Familienforscher* (Leipzig) and *Mein Heimatland* (Karlsruhe), we can assume that there was considerable non-Jewish interest in the book.³³ But while the *Heimat History* might have attracted a broad readership of its own accord, the potential audience that Rosenthal identified in the book, as well as the context in which it was written, suggests that his message was intended primarily for a local Jewish audience.

In the foreword to the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal named three groups for whom his book would be appropriate. First and foremost were the Jewish families of Baden and their school-age children. “First of all, may [the book] enter the houses of the Jews of Baden. May it tell the youth in higher, technical and vocational schools about the past of their ancestors on local (*heimisch*) soil, and provide the religious teacher with material he can communicate to elementary school students.” The

³¹ Ibid., 456.

³² Ibid., 312.

³³ See the reviews in the Berthold Rosenthal Collection, VII/6.

second group consisted of Jews who had left Baden to live elsewhere. For them, the book could provide “a welcome reverie in happy childhood days and dear pictures of the Heimat.” Lastly, Rosenthal intended his *Heimat History* for those who have no special attachment to Baden, so that it might “help them, as a contribution to the history of German Jews, to understand the past of our community.” As far as this general audience was concerned, Rosenthal intended his book to serve an ambassadorial function: “If my work contributes—on the non-Jewish side—to the production of good will, if it facilitates an unbiased consideration of different ways of thought and worldviews, then my efforts have not been in vain.”³⁴

Why would Rosenthal address his Jewish audience with such specificity if his book was intended only “to counter those who would question [Jews’] allegiance to the *Vaterland*”? A much more plausible explanation is that Rosenthal intended his book to serve primarily as a textbook for religious instruction. In the foreword to the book, Rosenthal remarks that his intention to write the *Heimat History* “was brought closer to realization when the commission for the revision of the religious education curriculum, appointed by the *Oberrat der Israeliten in Baden*, recently [1924-25] placed strong emphasis on the cultivation of Jewish Heimat history in the schools.”³⁵ With the creation of a new subject of instruction, one would expect Rosenthal, a teacher with a long-standing passion for local history, to have an interest in writing a textbook.

In the absence of archival evidence, we can only speculate as to why the *Oberrat*, the highest administrative Jewish organization in Baden, would emphasize the teaching of Heimat history in schools.³⁶ In her study of Jewish education in Bavaria, Claudia Prestel interprets Jewish history instruction as a defensive posture against anti-Semitism: “As Jews were increasingly forced to defend their *Heimatrecht*, history instruction received a defensive function (*Abwehrfunktion*).”³⁷ The experience of visiting cultural sites and reading primary sources was supposed to convince Jewish children that their ancestors had lived on German soil for over a millennium. Prestel does not explain why it was so important for Jewish children—as opposed to non-Jewish ones—to believe this. Was it necessary to preach to the choir in order to instill pride and self-confidence?

While this may well have been the case, it is not the only possible explanation for a Jewish cultural preoccupation with Heimat. When we study the situation of Jews in Baden during the Weimar Republic, we can observe what Michael Brenner has called a “renaissance of Jewish culture”—the creation of new institutions, schools and voluntary associations inspired by a new sense of Jewish self-consciousness. The aim of this movement was not to make Germany’s Jews more German, but to define the terms of a distinct and coherent Jewish identity. This crisis in Jewish identity was precipitated by two opposing forces: on the one hand, the fear of anti-Semitism, and on the other, the concern that assimilation had uprooted German Jews from their traditions. We can interpret Rosenthal’s preoccupation with Heimat as symptomatic of this larger cultural development.

Let us first examine how anti-Semitism precipitated the turning inwards of Jewish community life in Baden. In the final chapter of the *Heimat History*, Rosenthal described the new wave of anti-Semitism that swept through Germany at the end of World War I. Although anti-Semitic campaigning was not as widespread in Baden as in Bavaria or Northern Germany, the distribution of anti-Semitic pamphlets and the rise of nationalist associations caused concern. Rosenthal noted that this movement did not precipitate a defensive stance on the part of Baden’s Jews so much as a renewed interest in

³⁴ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, vi.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.

³⁶ The records of the *Oberrat* were largely destroyed by the Nazis, although the possibility exists that some of the relevant documents may be stored in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. We do know, however, that *Heimatkunde* was a required school subject in Baden during the Weimar Republic. See Frank J. Hennecke, ed., *Schulgesetzgebung in der Weimarer Republik vom 11. August 1919 bis 24. März 1933. Sammlungen von Rechtsvorschriften des Reiches und der Länder Baden, Bayern und Preußen* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1991).

³⁷ Claudia Prestel, *Jüdisches Schul- und Erziehungswesen in Bayern 1804–1933: Tradition und Modernisierung im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 178.

Judaism. “The wave of anti-Semitism had the benefit for Judaism that many of its members, who had previously been very indifferent to it, now reflected on it once again and found their way back to it.”³⁸

Johanna Rosenthal recalled that the Jewish community of Mannheim experienced a time of crisis and transformation during the years of the Weimar Republic: “The economic consequences of the war, the commencing wave of anti-Semitism also led in Mannheim to a change in Jewish community life and to a strengthening of Jewish consciousness.” She noted that Hebrew was once again made a mandatory subject in religious education; the *Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt*, the Jewish community newspaper, published numerous articles about Jewish history; rabbi Max Grunewald founded a *Lehrhaus* to promote adult Jewish education, as well as a Jewish nationalist youth group to which all three of her children belonged. “It was during this time that my husband began to complete the material for his *Heimat History of the Jews of Baden* that he had collected over many years, to order and sift and to industriously write down the whole thing until the work was published in 1927.”³⁹

The fear of assimilation was an equally powerful catalyst for the renewal of Jewish self-consciousness. In his discussion of Jewish life in the Weimar Republic, Rosenthal often expresses anxiety that the foundations of Jewish identity were slowly being eroded. “In addition to the increase in mixed marriages and those leaving the faith, a general indifference towards Jewish issues (*jüdische Fragen*) made itself perceptible.”⁴⁰ The inflation of the early 1920s contributed to this trend by forcing many rabbis and religious teachers out of the profession. As an aside, Rosenthal noted that the *Oberrat* placed the blame for this indifference in part on the quality of religious instruction in the schools. Although Rosenthal did not draw a causal connection between the two, one might conjecture that the *Oberrat*’s concern led to the formation of the commission responsible for revising the religious curricula, which in turn emphasized the teaching of Heimat history.

Baden’s Jews also feared that their community could no longer support itself demographically. Rosenthal noted the “distressing results” of the 1925 census, which showed that the Jewish community had lost over 1800 members since 1910, while the rest of the population had grown by 10% in the meantime. The anxiety that Jewish identity was being eroded through increasing intermarriage, declining birth rates and conversion had been prevalent among Jews throughout Germany since the turn of the century. One of the most prominent of these doomsayers, Felix Theilhaber, declared in *The Decline of the German Jew* (1911) that “no cultural race stands so clearly before its collapse as the Jews in Germany.”⁴¹ The Jewish population of Baden and its largest community, Mannheim, had been declining since the 1880s. 27,278 Jews (1.74% of the total population) lived in Baden in 1880, 25,893 (1.29%) in 1905, 24,054 (1.1%) in 1925, and only 20,617 Jews in 1933. The Jewish population of Mannheim decreased slightly between 1910 and 1933, from 6,474 to 6,402, comprising 3.3% of population in 1910, 2.8% in 1925, and only 2.3% in 1933.⁴²

Amid these fears concerning assimilation and anti-Semitism, Baden’s Jews looked to a variety of different communal organizations, religious and educational institutions to consolidate a sense of Jewish identity that could keep pace with the times. Rosenthal’s *Heimat History* should be seen as a comparable effort on the part of a Jewish pedagogue and historian to make sense of Jewish identity under these circumstances. Through his idea of a German-Jewish Heimat, Rosenthal accepted the assimilation necessary for forging a German nation while simultaneously exhorting the Jews of Baden to maintain the traditions that defined their *Eigenart*. For Rosenthal, this compromise was no more

³⁸ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, 392.

³⁹ Johanna Rosenthal, “Einiges aus unserm gemeinsamen Leben,” 25.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, *Heimatgeschichte der badischen Juden*, 435.

⁴¹ Felix A. Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1911), 3.

⁴² Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden*, 12; Franz Hundsnurscher and Gerhard Taddey, *Die jüdischen Gemeinden in Baden*, 22–23.

paradoxical than celebrating the Badense Heimat while affirming one's commitment to the German nation.

Conclusion

Rosenthal's use of "Heimat" as a framework for addressing issues of German-Jewish identity provides us with an important insight into the broader cultural politics of Weimar Germany. His ability to appropriate the discourse of German regionalism for Weimar's "renaissance of Jewish culture" suggests a formal affinity between the two movements: community-conscious Jews and proponents of the traditional Heimat movement believed the pressures of modernity—whether economic, industrial or demographic—had called into question the relationship between their sub-national identity and the German nation itself. As Alon Confino argues in *The Nation as Local Metaphor*, the ingenuity with which German identity was re-imagined by such movements contradicts the *Sonderweg* conception of a monolithic national identity dictated by old regime élites.

If "provincial" can be used figuratively to connote a community's affective distance from the nation, then we might be justified in calling Germany a "nation of provincials" in more ways than one. That Rosenthal could use the language of the Heimat movement to articulate his anxieties about Jewish identity indicates that the problem of "provincialism"—whether conceived in regional, religious or class terms—was widespread in early twentieth-century Germany. His notion of a German-Jewish Heimat has much in common with the hyphenated identities of American multiculturalism, suggesting that that the struggle to forge multicultural identities is not a phenomenon unique to our post-modern age, but rather the twentieth century's *Eigenart*.⁴³

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⁴³ On multiculturalism in early twentieth-century Germany, see the pathbreaking work by Till van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity, and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860–1925*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

