

Jewish Networks

by Mirjam Thulin

Jewish networks are the far-reaching transterritorial and transcultural channels of communication between Jews and Jewries. They formed as a result of the dispersal of Jewish society over great distances starting in antiquity and ran along the lines of Jewish congregational organisations, specific religious and doctrinal practices, and the commercial networks of Jewish merchants. Life in the Jewish diaspora and the local juridical regulations regarding the Jews constantly influenced and shaped Jewish networks in the period from the middle of the 15th until the 20th century.

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Introduction: The Damascus Affair of 1840

In February 1840 an Italian monk and his Muslim servant disappeared in Damascus. Rumours began to circulate that the monk and his servant had last been seen in the Jewish quarter. Soon, there were allegations that the Jews had murdered both men for ritual purposes. Numerous local Jews were arrested and tortured until they confessed. Reports of the affair in the European press as well as the political interests of European powers in the region made it into an episode of European significance.¹

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Prominent Jews, Jewish scholars and the emerging Jewish press in Western Europe fought against the accusations of ritual murder, the gruesome treatment of the prisoners which led to the death of four inmates, and the religiously motivated negative portrayal of Jews in the press. Soon after the affair became public, the Parisian lawyer and politician Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880) (→ Media Link #ab) strove to disprove reports in the French press alleging that the Damascan Jews had been responsible for murdering the monk. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) (→ Media Link #ac) reported from Paris for the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* and also backed the accused.² Baron James de Rothschild (1792–1868) (→ Media Link #ad) also intervened from Paris after he was made aware of the situation by a letter from the Amsterdam merchant Hirsch Lehren (1784–1853) (→ Media Link #ae). Rothschild was later called upon to advise the Austrian consul general in Alexandria, Anton von Laurin. Salomon Mayer de Rothschild (1774–1855) (→ Media Link #af), the Viennese representative of the Rothschild banking house, was interviewed by Prince Metternich (1773–1859) (→ Media Link #ag) about the affair and became a “self-designated *shtadlan*”,³ an intercessor for the Jews. The Board of Deputies of British Jews, which represented Jews from Britain, organised a meeting to determine further steps of action and formulate appeals to the English, French and Austrian governments. In Germany, the Magdeburg rabbi Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889) (→ Media Link #ah) reported on the accusations against and treatment of the prisoners in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, (→ Media Link #ai) which he published, as did the Leipzig orientalist Julius Fürst (1805–1873) (→ Media Link #aj) in his weekly *Der Orient*. (→ Media Link #ak) Finally, in the summer of 1840, the Central Israelite Consistory of France commissioned Crémieux, together with a prominent representative of the English Jewish community, Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) (→ Media Link #al), to take an unofficial diplomatic trip to Damascus to appeal to the regional leaders and the diplomatic representatives of European countries.⁴ In the end, Crémieux and Montefiore’s mission resulted in the release of the prisoners and the retraction of the ritual murder accusations by the local potentates. The two men were celebrated as quasi-messianic heroes of the Jews of Europe and the Middle East.⁵

The Damascus Affair and the efforts towards a satisfactory resolution revealed the transnational ties of the Jews and a dynamic communication network. A network of assistance was activated in which English and French Jews and the representatives of the Rothschild banking house were the most prominent actors and to a certain extent formed the hubs of the network.⁶ On the one hand, they wanted to free their fellow believers in Damascus from imprisonment, and, on the other hand, they wanted to counteract the emerging prejudiced images of Jews and Judaism in the press and in European society. It had not taken long for general accusations against the Jews to spread and for the ritual murder legends which had been nearly forgotten to be revived; “scientific” discussions of human sacrifice in the Jewish religion were conducted as well as theological disputations about the Talmud. To counteract this, diverse channels of communication were opened: representatives of congregations like those in Paris and London with influential leaders like Crémieux and Montefiore as well as political advisors of European governments like the banking family Rothschild acted together in the Jewish tradition of advocacy (*Shtadlanut*), while Jewish newspapers as well as rabbis and scholars in Germany countered the anti-Jewish prejudices and attempted to publically rebut them.⁷ Finally, the Damascus Affair was also a key event leading to the foundation of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)*. Formed in 1860 in Paris, the *Alliance* became the largest organisation of Jews worldwide. The *Alliance* arose out of the common interest in internal communication, coordinated assistance and acts of solidarity and acted as an informal diplomatic representative of the Jews. After the end of the 19th century, it also increasingly fostered the spread of Western education among fellow believers in regions like Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.⁸ The *Alliance* drew thereby on Enlightenment, French-Liberal, and Republican ideals⁹ while further orienting itself on bodies of traditional Jewish knowledge and experience.¹⁰

Even before the foundation of the *Alliance*, however, the Jewish network which had developed as a result of the Damascus Affair revealed that Jews and Jewries felt connected and expressed solidarity beyond the borders of rulers and states. At the same time, this network of communication was influenced by the dispersal of the Jews over far distances which stretched from the Middle East to Europe. (→ Media Link #am) News could be conveyed and exchanged swiftly via the Jewish congregations, and the high level of mobility allowed the principle characters to travel quickly to the main centres – to the Egyptian and Ottoman courts as well as the European chancelleries and courts.

Communication in the Jewish Diaspora

These relationships and the network of communication between Jews and Jewries did not, however, first form in the 19th century or as a result of the Damascus Affair; rather they had a long tradition. Jewish networks had already crystallized in antiquity as the Jewish communities became dispersed across long distances, and transterritorial and transcultural communicative channels between Jews and Jewries were intertwined over long distances. Life in the diaspora also shaped and characterised the specifics of the Jewish networks: the common religion and religious practices, the resulting high rate of active and passive literacy, the combination of a common sacral language with the many local languages used by the Jews, congregational and mercantile connections, a high degree of mobility, and the exclusion of the Jews from many societies.¹¹

The shared religious practice and culture, the common liturgical language and the constant allusion to the biblical land connected Jews everywhere. Every Jew was required to study the Bible daily, which had the effect that Jews learned to read and write at a young age—abilities which they shared in Christian Europe only with the educated clerical and aristocratic elites. Living in the diaspora fostered a high level of mobility, both between Jewish congregations and of individual travellers, and this strengthened congregational, mercantile and familial connections over great distances. Because of their mobility and high rate of literacy, network connections could be formed and maintained both orally – through travels by way of personal meetings or commercial contacts – as well as in writing. In addition to the sacred Jewish language, Hebrew, Jews also mastered numerous local languages. As a result, hybrid languages (pidgin) like Yiddish or Ladino developed which facilitated communication with non-Jews as well. This simplified dealings for Jewish merchants, scholars and other travellers. However, other aspects of the situation, i.e. the social exclusion of Jews based on their religion and the mostly prejudiced assumptions about the Jews, also contributed to their solidarity and

the creation and continuation of Jewish networks. As a result, at least in Christian Europe from the mid-fifteenth century until the elimination of the European Jewry by National Socialism, communication in the Jewish diaspora was characterised by a constant “dialectic of assimilation” (Funkenstein), by a genuinely dialectical process between acculturation and self-assertion, between isolation and openness (towards wider society) in the history of the Jews.¹² This is connected not only with problems related to the material environment of the Jews and their surrounding cultures, questions of relational history, the transfer processes, and interpretation and translation phenomena. Rather, it also involves questions of laws and demands towards the Jews like occupational limitations and social discrimination, as well as ambivalent, usually anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic, perceptions and attributions. These attributions, which very early regarded certain Jewish forms and structures of communication as threatening, surfaced in the 19th century especially as conspiracy theories,¹³ as a variety of critiques of capitalism¹⁴ or, often closely related to the latter, in the form of criticism of Jews for allegedly lacking a genuine Jewish country, state or land.¹⁵

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The Jewish network of contacts and the high level of mobility thus grew out of the way of life in the diaspora and also out of the concrete historical experience of the Jews in the diaspora.¹⁶ This part of the Jewish historical experience was fed principally by the violence against the Jews, the hardship of the anti-Semitic regulations of the authorities, the banishments and violent expulsions, the widespread anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic agitation, as well as legal and punitive conflicts.¹⁷ Collectively, these can be characterised as a “body of experience”, and these events and conditions were perceived by the Jews themselves to be crises of the entire Jewish community which were by no means limited to Europe and which shaped the resulting actions of the Jews.

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In the following, this essay will describe communication within the diaspora and the mobility which shaped the diverse forms of communication according to the three main channels of communication in the Jewish diaspora: first as related to the connections between and the organisation of Jewish congregations, second as related to scholarly exchange and religious practice and, finally, third, as related to trade and travel. As will be illustrated by looking at some of these networks, these paths of communication could interact with one another to varying degrees.¹⁸ Finally, the essay will examine Jewish networks and their importance for Europe and European history from a cultural historical perspective.

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Jewish Autonomy and Intercongregational Organisation

The Jewish diaspora stretches back to the Romans' destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE.¹⁹ Starting in the Middle Ages, the way of life in a *Kehilla* (Hebrew, “congregation”) became established as the sphere of life and experience of the Jews.²⁰ Lacking a Jewish state, solidarity was achieved by religious and socioeconomic institutions rather than political ones, which encouraged the development of communication between Jews and Jewish congregations. In this process, the form and organisation of Jewish congregations was engaged in a give-and-take with the surrounding cultures: while the Jewish community strove to make and enforce religious, criminal and civil legal decisions based upon its own beliefs, the authorities granted the Jewish communities a certain level of self-administration and autonomy within the estates to ensure tax revenues. This continued within the imperial polity into the Modern Age.

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In the Middle Ages, the recognition of a single political authority in the Islamic world together with a religious doctrinal authority presiding over multiple congregations promoted the development of long-term connections between individual congregations. Until the 13th century, the Exilarchs (Aramaic *resh galuta*, “head of the diaspora”) were recognized as the highest secular Jewish authorities, which were closely connected to the leaders of influential Babylonian Talmud academies in Sura and Pumbedita until the 11th century. Together they stood in the centre of a communication network organised according to the principles of religious law. Within this context they were able to make and enforce religious as well as criminal and civil legal decisions with constant reference to the Jewish religion and sacred texts. In the Ottoman Empire (→ Media Link #an) this system of inner-Jewish authority was sustained by recognition from outside the Jewish community: the *Hacham Bashi* (Hebrew/Turkish, “chief rabbi”) of Constantinople was not only recognized by the congregations and rabbis of the province, but also by the Ottoman rulers as the highest Jewish authority.

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In Europe, by contrast, the disunity of Christian authority in the medieval and early modern periods encouraged the independence of the individual congregations. The autonomy conferred by religious, criminal and civil law was adapted to the structures and hierarchies of the estates and feudal system and shaped the “dialectic of assimilation” and thereby the relationship between autarchy and isolation. The local congregations, which were usually contained within limited residential quarters and economically fairly homogenous because of professional and legal limitations, were led by congregational representatives and rabbis, often outstanding Talmudic scholars. The leaders and rabbis served as local communication experts between congregations and towards the Christian authorities.²¹ The Jewish community dealt with questions and strife based on their own concepts of law and civil justice and avoided involving the local institutions. Thus, already in the Middle Ages, cooperative models based on the close contact of the congregations formed which created out of multiple congregations a context for communication and a more stable structure for Jewish autonomy.²²

▲ 11

At the beginning of the early modern period, the legal status of the Jews was dependent upon the tolerance and interests of individual rulers, increasingly so with the strengthening of territorial authorities. Just as the Empire was not centrally organised, there was no central organisation of the Jews or Jewish congregations after the 17th century. In contrast, the large populations of Polish and Lithuanian Jews became more centralised. From the mid-sixteenth until the mid-eighteenth century an “intercongregational” organisation was created, the so-called *medinot* (Hebrew, “states”), which fulfilled administrative tasks via closer, mostly local connections.²³ Thus, the “Council of Four Lands”, the synod of the Polish and Lithuanian congregations (Hebrew, *Vaad arba Arzot*), which was originally formed to coordinate the tax payments of those congregations and to enforce questions of religious law more effectively, soon became a body for the largely independent self-administration of the Jews. It was recognised and supported by the Polish monarchy because of the advantages for taxation and demographic control.²⁴ Although such intercommunal organisations accommodated the religious, civil and criminal legal decisions of the rabbinic courts, they also shaped the consciousness of mutual solidarity, alliance and the support for social welfare among the Jews. Beyond that they also created the opportunity for a representation of common interests to the authorities.²⁵

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The Jewish autonomy and the intercongregational organisation are especially reflective of the “dialectic of assimilation”: on the one hand they became part of the estate and state-system and, on the other hand, they formed a sphere of communication for the larger Jewish congregational organisation. Until the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the 19th century, the Jewish congregations and their organisation remained in this interdependent form and had a lasting effect on the sphere of inner-Jewish communications. As Jews were legally gradually recognised (→ Media Link #ao) as individuals rather than a separate group in the course of the 19th century, Jewish self-administration in all its forms was abolished by rulers and governments everywhere. Nevertheless, in the Modern Age, the Jewish congregations, at least in large cities, remained influential and acted as nodes in the network of inner-Jewish communication.

▲ 13

Jewish Scholarship and Piety

The assertion of identity and openness towards the surrounding cultures in the “dialectic of assimilation” shaped both the way of life within the scattered congregations and the transmission of Jewish knowledge and experience in the diaspora. Every devout Jew is required to be able to read and explain sacred texts, and the synagogue is thus a house of learning. In this way, the Talmud and the *Halakhah*, the “religious law”, became established over the course of centuries. To a certain extent, religious law and religious practice are a form of knowledge, a path to knowledge, which shaped the actions of the Jews. Until the Jewish Enlightenment (→ Media Link #ap) (*Haskalah*), the *Halakhah* was an important form with which the Jews structured their knowledge. Preserved and passed down through time, sacred texts like Talmud commentaries or codices contained not only Jewish knowledge, but, to an equal extent, non-Jewish and historical knowledge. These texts served as a method of collective memory of the Jewish people and preserved a body of knowledge and experience.²⁶

▲ 14

The following of the *Halakhah* and its constant interpretation were a main element in the emergence of network-like connections among Jews and Jewish congregations.²⁷ The diaspora forced Jews to transmit their knowledge over distance and time. This was achieved via the *halakhic* forms.²⁸ The study of sacred texts alone demanded (and still de-

mands) an intense process of communication which included active and passive literacy, personal contact among scholars, and the exchange and application of individual knowledge. As with the congregational and mercantile contacts, individual contacts in the scholarly exchange were created on the local level by rabbis, scholars and the local rabbinical courts, while contacts over further distances were established between Talmud academies, major courts or exceptional rabbinical scholars.²⁹ Even in the Middle Ages the mobility of Jewish scholars overlapped with that of merchants and salesmen. Often, Jewish merchants were also scholars.³⁰ The travels of rabbis, their pupils or Jewish merchants and the simultaneous transport and exchange of manuscripts, scrolls and letters were signs of a multi-channeled exchange of knowledge.³¹ Because the traditional doctrinal authorities were responsible for the civil and criminal legal decisions up until the modern age, the written communication in so-called “responsa” (written rabbinical decisions) was a decisive method of social discipline within the congregations.³² This intercongregational organisation connected communication and discipline in Eastern Europe until the end of Jewish autonomy in the 19th century.

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Rabbinical responsa and the passing down of doctrinal methods and knowledge via scholarly travels were crucial paths of scholarly communication. The respective local cultures of knowledge and their more or less fixed cultural or social practices influenced the transmission of Jewish knowledge and experience as well.³³ Thus, the invention of printing led to the acceleration and expansion of the network of communication and knowledge in the Jewish diaspora after the 16th century. Printed documents and news travelled quickly into the most remote regions over established paths of communication and trade. In the 17th century, special mystical-cabbalistic doctrinal teachings spread in this way and strengthened the messianic expectations of the Jews. The Jewish messianic hope, according to which a Messiah would come and gather the Jewish people from the diaspora before leading them to the biblical land of Israel, became more popular in the 17th century, when European Jews experienced many catastrophes. In 1648, many Jews were killed or expelled from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth as a result of the Chmielnicki Massacre. During this period, Shabtai Zvi (1626–1676) (→ Media Link #aq), who was at first unknown, violated religious law in Smyrna and was excommunicated by the local rabbinical court. He fled to the Holy Land, to the city of Safed in the north. There Shabtai Zvi met Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680) (→ Media Link #ar), a young scholar from Jerusalem. With the help of a cabbalistic interpretation of Shabtai Zvi’s religious infractions, Nathan of Gaza proclaimed Shabtai Zvi at their first meeting to be the Messiah and son of David. The supposed Messiah Shabtai Zvi and his prophet Nathan of Gaza became known throughout the entire Jewish diaspora within a short time (1665–1666) via the dense network of congregational contacts and the scholarly communication of rabbis and their pupils as well as the assistance of travelling Jewish merchants. Nathan’s and Shabtai Zvi’s writings were rapidly distributed in the form of pamphlets and proclamations. The shared religious and doctrinal practices in distant parts of the Jewish diaspora, the common communication in Hebrew and high rate of literacy of the Jews in general, as well as the mobility of knowledge and scholars led to a wide acceptance of the supposed Messiah. Similar to the way that the Wittenberg Reformation became a “media revolution”³⁴ due to the invention of printing, the far-reaching impact of Shabtai Zvi in the Jewish diaspora was made possible by the rapid distribution of the writings of Nathan of Gaza, which declared Shabtai Zvi to be the Messiah, and the pamphlets, copied en masse, which depicted the Messiah and his prophet, Nathan of Gaza.³⁵

▲ 16

As a result of the Messianism and the cult around Shabtai Zvi, forms of Jewish scholarly networks became visible beyond political and cultural boundaries. They drew on religious practice, the active and passive literacy, and the common Hebrew language. They employed modern techniques like the printing press and remained in place until the destruction of the European Jewry by National Socialism. The scholarly networks did change in response to the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, through the emancipation and gentrification of the Jews as well as the improvement and technical advancement of the paths of communication. However, although they now integrated new forms of scholarship and piety, they nevertheless continued to be rooted in the traditional Jewish forms of communication.

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Trade and Travel

Trade and travel were, in addition to congregations and intercongregational organisations, further important channels of communication in the Jewish diaspora. Already in antiquity the Jews belonged to the diasporic societies which played an important role as traders. Among Jewish travellers as well, long-distance merchants and peddlers were the largest group up into the Modern Age.³⁶ Excluded from agriculture and craftsmanship in medieval Christian Europe, forbidden to settle permanently, and constantly threatened with expulsion, Jews were forced to pursue “unproductive” occupations

in trade and money lending.³⁷ These professional limitations as well as the rift and animosities between the Christian and Muslim worlds had already in the Middle Ages proven to be advantageous for Jews as it had made Jewish merchants into intermediaries between Christendom and the Islamic world.³⁸ The wares which Jewish handlers had procured in Islamic lands or in India, primarily luxury goods like dye, spices, medicine and also slaves, were first introduced to Europe in this way.³⁹

▲ 18

The religious policies of Europe's ruling houses and the social exclusion of Jews led to the solidification and expansion of Jewish congregational and mercantile networks well into the Modern Age. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), for example, created the trade network of western Sephardic Jews in the mid-fifteenth century.⁴⁰ Up into the late 18th century, Sephardic Jews – i.e. Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent – and Crypto-Jews⁴¹ successfully established themselves in the trade of jewels and precious metals from the New World. Even though they were forbidden to step onto Spanish soil, they maintained contacts with the merchants of the Iberian Peninsula while forming new relationships with the Americas.⁴² The expulsions forced Jewish merchants to build up new centres of trade in England, the Netherlands, Italy and France and to learn new languages in addition to Spanish, Portuguese and Ladino (Judaeano-Spanish). The merchants relied on the Jewish congregations and familial connections for support and accommodations and could thus establish centres of communication. The common language and culture of the scattered Jewries, like their multilingualism, made it easier for Jewish merchants to communicate. For their own congregations, Jewish merchants and travellers functioned both as letter-carriers and distributors of information.⁴³

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In the same period, the institution of "Court Jews" gradually became established in the royal houses of Europe.⁴⁴ Especially within the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, the local lords were increasingly inclined to tolerate Jews, as long as they could be politically and economically valuable. Some indeed were, for they stabilised the finances of princely courts and national budgets in their role as bankers, distributors, or advisors. The Jews' national and international trade contacts were especially useful to the rulers for the business of subsidies. Although individual Jews had previously been closely associated with ruling houses for purposes of trade and finance, the Court Jews of the Modern Age were more numerous, and they were explicitly connected to Jewish communities. After the expulsions of the Middle Ages, many urban Jewish congregations were refounded in the Modern Age by family members or business associates of Court Jews. As representatives, Court Jews communicated Jewish interests to the rulers and acted as *shtadlanim* (Hebrew, "advocate") for individual Jews or entire congregations.⁴⁵

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The intercession of privileged Court Jews and Jewish merchants and the intense communication between the Jewish congregations of Europe became evident whenever fellow believers were in distress. This was the case in the year 1744/1745, for example, when Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780) (→ Media Link #au) ordered the banishment of the Jews from Prague as part of her policies against non-Catholics in the Habsburg territories and later extended this decree to include Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁶ The Jews from Prague and Vienna informed the large Jewish congregations in England, Italy and Denmark, and even the congregations within the Ottoman Empire, about the banishment. Diego d'Aguilar (1699–1759), the descendant of a Portuguese Jewish converso family, and Wolf Wertheimer (1681–1765) (→ Media Link #av), son of the Viennese Court Jew Samson Wertheimer (1658–1724) (→ Media Link #aw), coordinated the resistance to the expulsion from Vienna. They wanted the empress to receive protests against the banishment from as many influential royal courts and high-ranking individuals as possible. Wertheimer's son-in-law, Moses Kann (died 1762) (→ Media Link #ax), the chief rabbi of Hesse-Darmstadt and leader of the Talmud school in Frankfurt am Main, procured a personal letter from the archbishop of Mainz (→ Media Link #ay) to the empress, and shortly thereafter multiple European courts interceded on behalf of the Jews. The Italian congregations even persuaded the pope (→ Media Link #az) to object. The Ottoman sultan sent messengers to Maria Theresa, as well. Although the end of the Second Silesian War (1744–1745) certainly influenced the decision, the congregations and Court Jews successfully obtained permission for the return of the Bohemian and Moravian Jews to their places of residence in May of 1745, while the Jews from Prague were forced to wait until 1748 for this right.

▲ 21

Because of their way of life in the diaspora and their uncertain legal status, Jews were forced to develop structures of political involvement like advocacy (*Shtadlanut*). The conditions of the "dialectic of assimilation" and especially the legislation of the Habsburg empress activated the network of assistance for saving the threatened Jewish congregations.

The precarious legal status of Jews in Europe, which shaped their existence between acculturation and self-assertion, between isolation imposed by the authorities and isolation chosen by the Jews themselves, became even more uncertain in 1744 due to the religious policies of the empress. Nevertheless, the expulsion of the Jews from Prague, Bohemia and Moravia motivated the congregations in the large cities, the Court Jews, their families and influential scholars to use the Jewish communication network and mobilise against the banishment.

▲ 22

In the course of the 19th century the absolutist states disappeared and with them went the Court Jews. Thereafter, albeit slowly, the Jews were granted civil rights. However, the early modern trade network and the tradition of advocacy by prominent Jews did not disappear completely but survived into the 19th century and adapted to new challenges – as did the mercantile trade in general.⁴⁷ The Damascus Affair of 1840 revealed one of the more well-known business networks, that of the Rothschild family, and showed how skilfully it could be used to benefit the Jews of Damascus. The family did not focus their energy only on the money trade, capital investments or the railway network, but also used their connections to relieve the suffering of individual Jews and Jewish congregations. They acted thus as the Court Jews had in the previous centuries in the tradition of *Shtadlanut*. The home office of the family in Frankfurt am Main maintained contacts with the branches in Paris, London, Vienna and Naples and with a European-wide network of agents with far-reaching business connections. It thereby created the basis for an effective exchange of information.⁴⁸ In the Modern Age, this communication network was kept alive via trade and travel, though it was increasingly supplemented by new and other trade networks.

▲ 23

Summary

Communication within the Jewish diaspora, at least in Europe from the mid-fifteenth until the 20th century, was shaped by the circumstances the diaspora imposed on the Jews. Unified by their common religion, culture and language and supported by a high degree of active and passive literacy as well as an unusually high level of mobility, the Jews developed a relatively stable and far-reaching network of communication within Europe and beyond.⁴⁹ The main channels of communication in the Jewish diaspora operated via the Jewish congregations, via paths which had been created by the enforcement and interpretation of religious practice, as well as via the trade networks. The recognition of Jewish autonomy within the European feudal system created a relatively safe legal status for Jews, although it could not protect them completely from expulsions. This autonomy, especially in the form of intercongregational organisations, however, also reinforced the bond and solidarity between Jewish communities and local Jewries. Religious practice in the form of the *Halakhah* and the scholarly exchange which ensued from it were the basis for the circulation of Jewish knowledge. Via the specific forms of scholarly communication, doctrinal methods and contents could be transmitted and spread over time and space, and the culture of discussion between Jewish scholars in the diaspora was thereby significantly influenced and encouraged. Trade and travel revealed the extraordinary mobility of the Jews as well as their multilingualism.

▲ 24

The structures of communication in the Jewish diaspora and the networks they employed shaped the preservation of Jewish knowledge, traditional institutions and values. The continuation of premodern paths of communication and knowledge on the one hand and the constant transterritorial and transcultural connections of the Jews on the other led to a steady coexistence of premodern and modern elements of communication, which were accompanied by the adaptation of new communication technologies in the Modern Age.⁵⁰ Communication within the individual Jewish communities and congregations of the premodern period was similar to that of the traditional surrounding societies; namely, it was limited to the local congregation and usually created by oral or symbolic acts, it concerned primarily local or familial contacts, and it was based on personal meetings. However, the communicative forms of Jews in their intercongregational organisation, trade, travel and scholarly exchange resembled modern forms of communication.⁵¹ These quasi-modern channels of communication and network connections were dependent, however, upon the conditions of the medieval, European economy and the religiously motivated social exclusion of the Jews from vocations in agriculture and the crafts. For this reason the Jewish networks, which had developed since the Middle Ages, became more important for premodern Jewish society as a sphere of communication for the collective as well as for individuals.

▲ 25

Following the dissolution of Jewish autonomy during the *Haskalah* and their legal emancipation, Jews in Europe increasingly pinned their hopes on the countries in which they lived. The memory of the biblical land of Israel and the longing for Zion continued to provide a more or less fixed geographical point of orientation, but until the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, this was primarily passed down in a spiritual, symbolic manner in rituals and prayers and gained a concrete orientation based on the land itself only with the Zionist movement (→ Media Link #b0) at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the 20th century. Although the religious forms remained, for the Ashkenazim (→ Media Link #b1) (that is, in a general sense, for the European Jewry) the largely secularised unity of the Jews in the Modern Age rested on the symbolic forms of mutual unity and solidarity. It was related to the so-called “Jewish question” on a transnational level and in this way carried on the premodern historical experience of the Jewish diaspora. This historical experience was interpreted within a political context already in the Interwar period by historian Simon Dubnow’s (1860–1941) (→ Media Link #b2) autonomy concept. As part of the secular Jewish diaspora nationalism movement, Dubnow pleaded for a transterritorial and transnational autonomy of the Jews in order to ensure the legal equality of Jewish minorities, their self-administration and their independence in language and education.⁵² Contrary to the Zionists, who rejected the diaspora, and contrary to the religious hopes of some Jews who accepted the diaspora as divinely imposed while they waited for a Messiah to lead them back to the Holy Land, Dubnow interpreted the way of life in the diaspora as a positive historical condition and experience of the Jews. For Dubnow, the Jewish people, who were part of the history of nearly every continent, country and region, were the “most historical” of all peoples, because “[die] Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes durchläuft, gleich einer Centralachse, die ganze Geschichte der Menschheit von deren einem Pol bis zum anderen”.⁵³

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In this sense, the Jewish networks embody the very conditions and experiences of the Jews in the “dialectic of assimilation”. The main paths of communication via the autonomous congregations, religious practice and trade remained the comparatively weak but constant ties of the Jewish diaspora.⁵⁴ They created a sphere of communication which not only reached across Europe, but connected Europe to its diverse neighbouring cultures. The Jewish networks, which consciously engaged their non-Jewish neighbours as well and thus became more visible evolved out of the normal channels of communication in times of crisis or other events which affected the entire Jewish diaspora.⁵⁵ These events – violence against Jews, expulsions, anti-Semitic agitation – which Jews perceived as crises, can be traced back to the conditions of living in the diaspora and can be seen as evidence of the constant process of assimilation and self-assertion of the Jews in their surrounding cultures.⁵⁶ If Europe and European history is understood as the product of a constant intercultural process of communication and transfer, in other words, as a sphere of communication, then the history of Jews and Jewish networks are moments and processes of this communicative context.⁵⁷ Because Jews lived everywhere in Europe and were not bound to national states, they, based on their transnational, multilingual, mobile and primarily urban way of life, can be viewed as modern or postmodern “Europäer *avant la lettre*”.⁵⁸

▲27

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Appendix

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Notes

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- ¹ Concerning the events, meaning, and European dimension of the Damascus Affair see Hyamson, *The Damascus Affair 1952* and especially Frankel, *The Damascus Affair 1997*. For the significance of the Damascus Affair for the Jews in France cf. also Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity 2006*, pp. 120–137.
- ² On the journalistic context in the German-speaking world see Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffäre 1927*. And for Germany, cf. Krone, *Die Berichterstattung zur Damaskus-Affäre 2007*. On the role of the Rothschilds, cf. Erb, *Die "Damaskus-Affäre" 1994*.
- ³ Frankel, *The Damascus Affair 1997*, p. 120. Shtadlanim (Hebrew plural of shtadlan) were “advocates” in negotiations with non-Jewish authorities. They were appointed by the Jewish congregations or by the authorities.
- ⁴ For the political situation in which Crémieux and Montefiore met and concerning the development of the mission, cf. Frankel, *The Damascus Affair 1997*, p. 331–361. Also on the background and the significance of the Damascus Affair cf. Diner, *"Meines Bruders Wächter" 2003*, p. 117f.
- ⁵ Cf. for example, Yeroushalmi, *Source 23 Song of Praise and Prayer 2009*. The release was, however, due to far-reaching political circumstances: cf. Frankel, *The Damascus Affair 1997*, p. 348ff., 375ff.; Diner *"Meines Bruders Wächter" 2003*, p. 117.
- ⁶ This method of operation is typical mostly for actor-networks; cf. the characterisation of actor-networks in Belliger / Krieger, *Einführung in die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie 2006*, p. 41.
- ⁷ The positive aspects of the resolution of the affair were asserted most of all by the historian Heinrich Graetz, who saw in it a Renaissance of the Jewish people. This view dominated the historical perspective for a long time; see Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden 1870*, p. 479–511.
- ⁸ On the foundation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle cf. the first-person accounts: Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire 1911–1920*; Chouraqui, *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle 1965*. Further: Weill, *Emancipation et progrès 2000*; Bar-Chen, *Prototyp jüdischer Solidarität 2002*. On the forms of communication within the Alliance Israélite Universelle cf. Wilke, *Das deutsch-französische Netzwerk 2007/08*.
- ⁹ Cf. Leff, *Jewish Solidarity in Nineteenth-Century France 2002*. On the forms of Jewish solidarity in an organisation like the B'nai B'rith, cf. Wilhelm, *Community in Modernity 2002*. The educational measures of the Alliance are vividly portrayed in Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries 1993*.
- ¹⁰ This includes the forms of Jewish involvement like, for example, the Zedakah, the traditional social welfare and caring for the poor, and the Halukkah, the collection of contributions from Jews throughout the diaspora to support the Jewish settlement of the Holy Land.
- ¹¹ For a comprehensive overview of the theme of communication in Jewish context, see the collection by Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora 1996*, most importantly the overview article: Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey 1996*, as well as Gutwein, *Traditional and Modern Communication 1996*. More specifically on the understanding of communication of sacred texts, cf. Zohar, *Les pérégrinations des hommes de l'esprit 1993*.
- ¹² See Funkenstein, *The Dialectics of Assimilation 1995*. In this context “assimilation” denotes the consequences of the double character of the Jewish society in the diaspora as described by Funkenstein. At the same time the concept of “assimilation” has been addressed critically in Jewish historiography, cf. Rahden, *Verrat, Schicksal oder Chance 2005*.
- ¹³ The roots, however, are evident much earlier: cf. Heil, *"Gottesfeinde" – "Menschenfeinde" 2006*; on the forms of communication of conspiracy clichés, cf. p. 371–521. In the Modern Age, Antisemitica were primarily responsible for transmitting negative characterisations of the communication among the Jews, for example, the excerpt about the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the inflammatory writing by Marr, *Der Weg zum Siege des Germanenthums über das Judenthum 1880*, pp. 30–35. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer also portrayed the connectivity of the Jews in a negative light; cf. Schopenhauer, *Ahasver und die Winkelnation 1995*, p. 190.
- ¹⁴ For example, the economic history by Sombart with reference to the Jews, cf. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben 1911*, pp. 276–281. On this topic cf. Berg, *Ökonomie und Kollektivität 2006*.
- ¹⁵ Concerning the portrayal of Jews as Luftmenschen, cf. Berg, *Luftmenschen 2008*.
- ¹⁶ On the historical concept of experience cf. Koselleck, *"Erfahrungsraum" und "Erwartungshorizont" 1989*. For the example of medieval Jewish experience, cf. Eisenstadt, *Neither "Pariah People" nor "Fossilized Civilisation" 2004*.
- ¹⁷ On those four experiences which were perceived to be “crises” for the Jews, cf. Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*

- 1997, p. 3f.
18. ^ Here the account follows the systematic examination of the historian Menache; cf. Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996.
 19. ^ Nevertheless there were Jewish settlements outside the land of Israel starting in the 8th century BCE. Cf., Stein, Art. "Galut" 1928.
 20. ^ Basic is the classical work of Katz, *Tradition und Krise* 2002 (first in Hebrew 1958). In addition, see more recent publications, which also contain a thorough description of the latest research and new discussions: Gotzmann, *Jüdische Autonomie in der Frühen Neuzeit* 2008; Litt, *Geschichte der Juden Mitteleuropas* 2009. For an overview of communication within the Jewish diaspora in the ancient and medieval periods, see Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996.
 21. ^ Especially the excommunication from the Jewish community is an example for the function and effectiveness of communication between congregations. Cf. Katz, *Tradition und Krise* 2002, p. 130f.; Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996, p. 19f. On the significance of the ban, cf. Gotzmann, *Jüdische Autonomie* 2008, pp. 322–357.
 22. ^ For an example of intercommunal organisation and cooperation in the region of France in the twelfth century, cf. Chazan, *The Blois Incident* 1968.
 23. ^ The specific differences of forms of intercongregational organisation cannot be examined here. On this topic, cf. Katz, *Tradition und Krise* 2002, pp. 124–135.
 24. ^ On the Council of Four Lands see Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania* 2004, pp. 84ff., 95–98.
 25. ^ Katz, *Tradition und Krise* 2002, p. 132. Starting with the Damascus Affair in 1840, Jewish solidarity was also influenced by French liberal and republican ideals. Cf. Leff, *Jewish Solidarity in Nineteenth-Century France* 2002.
 26. ^ Cf. Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Erinnere Dich!* 1996.
 27. ^ On this path of communication, cf. Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996, pp. 30–46; Zohar, *La circulation de la halakha dans les espaces et le temps* 1993.
 28. ^ For the diversity of topics of rabbinical responsa, cf. the collection of sources by Goldish, *Jewish Questions* 2008.
 29. ^ The personal relationships are the easiest to follow. Within these personal relationships one can recognize forms of premodern relationships. Cf. Holzer, *Netzwerke* 2006, p. 12. Zohar emphasises this also for the Jewish transmission of knowledge: Zohar, *La circulation de la halakha* 1993, p. 246.
 30. ^ The most famous was the traveller Benjamin von Tudela in the 12th century, who wrote a report of his travels. Cf. Tudela / Regensburg, *Jüdische Reisen im Mittelalter* 1998. Witness accounts of the travels of the poet Jehuda Halevi (also 12th century) have also been preserved. Cf. Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove* 2008, esp. pp. 97–152. On the general topic, cf. Scheindlin *Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets* 2002.
 31. ^ These questions are also of interest to research concerning material culture. Cf. Grassby, *Material Culture and Cultural History* 2005.
 32. ^ For example, Cohen, *Correspondence and Social Control in Jewish Communities of the Islamic World* 1986.
 33. ^ Cf. Zittel, *Einleitung: Wissen und soziale Konstruktion* 2002. For an examination of the concept of the culture of knowledge from a more pronounced angle of intellectual history see: Detel, *Wissenskulturen und epistemische Praktiken* 2003, esp. p. 120.
 34. ^ Burkhardt, *Das Reformationsjahrhundert* 2002, esp. pp. 16–76.
 35. ^ This is a basic thesis in Scholem, *Sabbatai Zwi* 1992, p. 29. On the expansion of the movement in Europe cf. *ibid.*, p. 529–687; concerning the movement in Muslim countries cf. *ibid.*, p. 713–733.
 36. ^ Cf. Schwara, *Unterwegs* 2007, p. 76ff.
 37. ^ On Jewish money-lending, cf. Shatzmiller, *Shylock geht in Revision* 2007, pp. 71–107.
 38. ^ The cultural and communication history is documented for example in the following collection of sources on trade with India in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Goitein / Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* 2008. For an overview, primarily of the history in the Islamic world, cf. Scheindlin, *Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets* 2002. For an introduction into the role of Jews in trade and their mobility in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, cf. Trigano, *La société juive à travers l'histoire* 1993; Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross* 1994, pp. 77–103. On trade as a method of communication in the Jewish diaspora, cf. Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996, pp. 46–55.
 39. ^ An example for the trade of luxury goods by Jewish companies is the feather trade: Cf. Stein, *Mediterranean Jewries and Global Commerce in the Modern Period* 2007. In the 19th century, the feather trade was expanded into a global enterprise by Myer (1834–1896) and his son Nathan Salaman (died 1905). Cf. Rubinstein, *Jewish Top Wealth-holders in Britain* 2002, p. 151, 158.
 40. ^ For an overview of the western Sephardic networks, cf. Israel, *Diasporas within Diaspora* 2002, pp. 1–39.
 41. ^ Crypto-Jews were Jews who secretly practised the Jewish religion because they had been forced to convert to Christianity.
 42. ^ On this point cf., as one of many, Kaplan, *The Self-Definition of the Sephardi Jews* 2000. On the later trade net-

- works, the communication, and the relations and society of the “Port Jews” of the New World, cf. Kiron, *An Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters?* 2006.
43. ^ Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996, p. 48f. Furthermore, in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Central Europe, there were “postal Jews” who transported Hebrew and Yiddish letters and were tolerated by the Thurn and Taxis (the German princes who were key players in the German postal service). Cf. Gottheil / Kracauer, Art. “Jewish Letter-Carriers”.
 44. ^ On these topics, cf. Stern, *Der Hofjude im Zeitalter des Absolutismus* 2001; Meyer, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* 2000, pp. 106–125.
 45. ^ Concerning the legal relationships in the Holy Roman Empire, cf. Gotzmann / Wendehorst, *Zwischen Kaiser, Landesherrschaft und Halacha* 2007. On the function of the Court Jews as representatives, cf. Stern, *Der Hofjude im Zeitalter des Absolutismus* 2001, pp. 163–190; Ries, *Politische Kommunikation und Schtadlanut der frühneuzeitlichen Judenschaft* 2007, p. 181ff.
 46. ^ Cf. Mevorach, *Die Interventionsbestrebungen in Europa* 1980; Brugger et al, *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich* 2006, pp. 330–337.
 47. ^ Cf. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt* 2009, pp. 1029–1037.
 48. ^ On the network of agents and communication in the Rothschild family, cf. Liedtke, *N M Rothschild & Sons* 2006.
 49. ^ Before the Middle Ages there had indeed been little contact between the western and eastern diasporas. Cf. the seminal essay by Edrei / Mendels, *A Split Jewish Diaspora* 2007.
 50. ^ This is also the conclusion of the first systematic essays concerning communication in the Jewish diaspora. Cf. Menache, *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey* 1996; Gutwein, *Traditional and Modern Communication* 1996.
 51. ^ This is the basic observation of Harrison C. White, a researcher of networks; cf. Holzer, *Netzwerke* 2006, p. 81f.
 52. ^ Cf. Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes 1925–1930*; cf. Hilbrenner, *Diaspora-Nationalismus* 2006.
 53. ^ Dubnow, *Die jüdische Geschichte* 1898, p. 4.
 54. ^ First raised and conceptually developed in Granovetter, *The Strength of Weak Ties* 1973. According to this concept, the weak ties function primarily as social capital because they occupy certain positions of action within the network and have therefore access to relevant information and can build bridges.
 55. ^ Cf. Belliger / Krieger, *Einführung in die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie*, p. 40: “Netzwerkbildung beginnt dort, wo ein Problem empfunden wird.”
 56. ^ Cf. Funkenstein, *The Dialectics of Assimilation* 1995.
 57. ^ Cf. Diner, *Geschichte der Juden* 2003; Diner, *Imperiale Residuen* 2006.
 58. ^ Diner, *Imperiale Residuen* 2006, p. 261.

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- James de Rothschild (1792–1868) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/20436880>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/116641762>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116641762.html>)





Link #ae

- Hirsch Lehren (1784–1853) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/97995637>)





Link #af

- Salomon Mayer de Rothschild (1774–1855) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/30292938>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/116641924>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116641924.html>)

Link #ag


- Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/49258230>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118581465>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118581465.html>)

Link #ah

- Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/39529223>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/116176288>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116176288.html>)

Link #ai




- (http://www.compactmemory.de/library/seiten.aspx?context=pages&ID_0=3&ID_1=32&ID_2=684&ID_3=100000000)
Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums 1840, Compact Memory 

Link #aj

- Julius Fürst (1805–1873) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/9943935>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/116846275>)

Link #ak



- (http://www.compactmemory.de/library/seiten.aspx?context=pages&ID_0=23&ID_1=425&ID_2=7787&ID_3=81773&)
Der Orient 1840, Compact Memory 

Link #al

- Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/13112023>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/119177617>)

Link #am



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/school-of-the-alliance-israelite-universelle-in-edirne?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Edirne

Link #an

- Osmanische Geschichte Südosteuropas (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/modelle-und-stereotypen/tuerkengefahr-exotismus-orientalismus/markus-koller-die-osmanische-geschichte-suedosteuropas>)





Link #ao

- Judenemanzipation (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/europaeische-netzwerke/juedische-netzwerke/friedrich-batzenberg-judenemanzipation-im-18-und-19-jahrhundert>)

Link #ap

- Haskalah-Bewegung (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/europaeische-netzwerke/juedische-netzwerke/marie-schumacher-brunhes-haskalah-bewegung-in-europa-1770-1880>)

Link #aq

- Shabtai Zvi (1626–1676) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/3267035>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118793926>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118793926.html>)







- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-networks/resolveuid/ba73a4fba3064e1c27661b83d9968ad0?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Shabtai Zvi 1626–1676



Link #ar

- Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/2363327>)





Link #au

- Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/59876481>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118577867>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118577867.html>)





Link #av

- Wolf Wertheimer (1681–1765) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/100411877>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/139103791>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd139103791.html>)




Link #aw

- Samson Wertheimer (1658–1724) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/74962816>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/130548677>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd130548677.html>)

Link #ax

- Moses Kann (died 1762) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/81860961>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/137712642>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd137712642.html>)

Link #ay

- Archbishop Johann of Mainz (1689–1763) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/27867577>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118787314>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118787314.html>)

Link #az

- Pope Benedikt XIV (1675–1758) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/76327169>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118655434>)

Link #b0

- Zionismus vor 1914 (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/transnationale-bewegungen-und-organisationen/internationale-organisationen-und-kongresse/kerstin-armborst-weihs-zionismus-in-europa-bis-zum-ersten-weltkrieg-vor-1914>)

Link #b1

- Aschkenasische Juden (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/europa-unterwegs/juedische-migration/aschkenasische-juden-im-europa-der-fruehen-neuzeit/predrag-bukovec-aschkenasische-juden-im-europa-der-fruehen-neuzeit>)

Link #b2

- Simon Dubnow (1860–1941) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/41590> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118942859>)



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-networks/resolveuid/06efa532b1b8735f8e1fd7c6af339af0?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Simon Dubnow at the first YIVO Conference in Vilnius