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Religion in Austria is peer-reviewed

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Religion in Austria

Volume 3



PRAESENS VERLAG

Published with support from the
Kulturabteilung der Stadt Wien, Forschungs- und
Wissenschaftsförderung



and the Research Platform Religion and Transfor-
mation in Contemporary Society



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**Bibliographic information published by the
Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>

ISBN 978-3-7069-0955-6

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<http://www.praesens.at>

Vienna 2016

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Contents

<i>Hans Gerald Hödl and Lukas Pokorny</i> Preface	vii
<i>Eva-Marie Andiel</i> Austria's Halal Meat Market: In-Between Halal, Halalness, and Halalisation	1
<i>Júlia Gyimesi</i> From Spooks to Symbol-Formation: Early Viennese Psychoanalysis and the Occult	41
<i>Astrid Schweighofer</i> In Search of a Modern Identity: Conversions from Judaism to Protestantism in Fin de Siècle Vienna in the Context of the Life Reform Movement	69
<i>Wolfram Reiss</i> The Management of Religious Diversity in the Austrian Armed Forces	93
<i>Hans Gerald Hödl and Valerie Krb</i> The Milk of Human Kindness and the Burning Bosom: A Case Study on Mormon Conversion Narratives in Vienna	161
<i>Lukas Pokorny</i> The Unificationist Conversion Narrative: Current Perspectives on Past Experiences in the Austrian Unification Movement	215
Book Reviews	
<i>Brigitte Schinkele</i> Diskriminierung aus religiösen Gründen (Christian Brünner)	261

<i>Lukas Pokorny</i> Heiden, Christen, Juden und Muslime: Eine Geschichte der Religionen in Österreich (Anna Ehrlich)	269
<i>Lukas Pokorny</i> Inkulturation und ihre Relevanz für die Sozialarbeit mit AfrikanerInnen in Wien: Am Beispiel der afrikanischen katholischen Gemeinde (Julia Heneis)	275
<i>Richard Potz</i> Jehovas Zeugen in Österreich als Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts (Walter Hetzenauer)	281
<i>Astrid Schweighofer</i> Jüdisch-protestantische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1914 (Anna L. Staudacher)	289
<i>Lukas Pokorny</i> Staat und „Sekten“: Staatliche Information und Rechtsschutz (Heinz Mayer)	297
Contributors	305

Jüdisch-protestantische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1914.

by Anna L. Staudacher. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004. Teil 1: Pp. 495. Teil 2: Pp. 838. ISBN 978-3-631-50413-0. €170.60

Astrid Schweighofer

Between 1782 and 1914, Vienna counted around 6,000 conversions from Judaism to Protestantism. Most occurred after 1867/68, when legal equality was guaranteed to Austrian Jews by the constitution (*Staatsgrundgesetz über die allgemeinen Rechte der Staatsbürger*) and the so-called Interdenominational Law of May 1868 (*Interkonfessionellengesetz*) regulated changes of religion (Staudacher 2004a: 5-6).

Conversions from Judaism to Christianity were linked to the process of emancipation and assimilation, both of which were initiated by the reforms of Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790, r. 1765–1790). On January 2, 1782, Joseph II granted tolerance to the Jews of Vienna and Lower Austria and was thus the first to allow Jews to live a life of legal security, free from the permanent threat of being persecuted or expelled (Trinks 1970: 532; Lichtblau 1999: 29; Häusler 1988: 87).¹ In the following century, Jews took advantage of their social and economic opportunities. During this process, some of them were fully integrated into the non-Jewish society, leaving Judaism and their own Jewish background behind and converting to Catholicism or Protestantism. Around 1900, about half of those who left Judaism became Catholic, a third Protestant, whereas all others remained without any religious affiliation (Staudacher 2004a: 6).²

Anna L. Staudacher took up the phenomenon of conversions from Judaism to Protestantism in Vienna in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to present her two-volume work *Jüdisch-protestantische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1914*, the third study dealing with the topic of conversions after *Wegen jüdischer Religion – Findelhaus: Zwangstaufen in Wien 1816–1868*

1 For the religious tolerance granted to the Jews of other Habsburg countries and to the Protestants and Orthodox, see Lind 2006: 394-397; Trinks 1970: 532-535; Karniel 1986.

2 For other estimations and a summary, see Schweighofer 2015: 64.

(Staudacher 2001a and 2001b) and *Jüdische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1868* (Staudacher 2002a and 2002b). Volume 1 provides an overview of the historical setting and the legal framework of conversions from Judaism to Christianity in general and to Protestantism in particular, including name changes as well as statistical data and their analysis. The second half of volume 1 (pp. 287–464) contains a register for volume 2, classified by the converts' birthplaces, professions, and maiden names. Volume 2 includes an alphabetic list of the converts. In accordance with the data protection law, Staudacher did not include persons born after 1894, whose deaths have not been verified. Likewise, she did not take into account children who were born and baptised after their parents' conversions (Staudacher 2004a: 7):

It was not 'Jewish origin' which guided us—that ominous term which the racial laws of the Third Reich perpetuated—but Jewish birth.³

Based on a variety of handwritten documents,⁴ such as baptismal registers (*Taufmatriken*), protocols of conversions and church-entries (*Übertrittsprotokolle*, *Eintrittsbücher*), baptism requests (*Taufgesuche*), requests for name change (*Gesuche um Namensänderung*), wedding registers (*Traumngsmatriken*), protocols of withdrawal from a religious community (*Austrittsprotokolle*), birth and death registers (*Geburts- und Sterbematriken*) etc., and, in addition to this, a biographical encyclopaedia and data-bases, volume 2 contains detailed biographical information on the converts from Judaism to Protestantism in Vienna between 1782 and 1914. These include name (including both maiden and baptismal name, as well as any possible name changes), date and place of birth, profession, date of leaving Judaism, age at the time of baptism, and date of baptism—including the specification of whether a person was baptised Lutheran or Reformed. In the footnotes to each name, we get information about the converts' parents, their godfather/godmother, their weddings and divorces, their professional life, their date of death, their burial place, etc. Staudacher also mentions if one reconverted to Judaism, as was for example the case with the composer and painter Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951), who was baptised in 1898 and re-entered the Jewish Community in 1933 (Staudacher 2004b: 639–640),⁵ or

3 “ [N]icht die 'jüdische Herkunft' hat uns geleitet, jener ominöser [*sic*] Begriff, der die Rassengesetze des Dritten Reiches weiterführt, sondern die jüdische Geburt” (Staudacher 2004a: 7).

4 The documents are from Protestant and Catholic parishes, the Jewish community, and other archives (Staudacher 2004a: 15–16).

5 For Arnold Schönberg's conversions, see also Schweighofer 2015: 184–189.

the writer Siegfried Lipiner (1856–1911), who changed his religion several times (Staudacher 2004a: 103, n. 190; Staudacher 2004b: 438).⁶

Staudacher uses bold letters, italics, and shadings of grey/black to mark married couples, siblings, or other family relationships and, thus, gives a good insight into the widespread relations between the converts. In the footnotes, the names of prominent persons, namely those who were included in biographic reference works, are also given in bold letters.⁷ However, Staudacher's comment that married couples are marked by shadings, bold letters *and* a frame, and that siblings are only marked by shadings, is not evident. As can be seen on p. 229, the siblings Rudolf, Bettina, and Heinrich Gomperz are equally framed and shaded as the bold marked couple Karl Bernhard and Leonie Gombrich.

Apart from these uncertainties concerning the graphic representation of relationships, and some slip-ups concerning data, volume 2 of *Jüdisch-protestantische Konvertiten in Wien 1782–1914* contains an abundance of biographical details and data and is therefore a good starting point for further biographic and prosopographic studies.⁸

Volume 1 begins with a very detailed description of the sources and methods used by the author (chapter 1, pp. 15–58). Baptisms required a considerable administrative and bureaucratic effort (p. 19), which is evident in the multitude of sources. Protestant and Catholic Parishes' baptismal registers and protocols of conversions and church-entries are the most important sources of personal information about converts (pp. 17, 26). The author discusses both the specifics and informational content of the sources used,⁹ mentioning that all sources are beset with writing-, reading-, or hearing-errors concerning data and names in particular (p. 18). It is interesting to learn that the data related to the conversions in the *Statistische Jahrbücher der Stadt Wien* are based on so-called protocols of withdrawal from a religious community (*Austrittsprotokolle*), where the person who left one religion/denomination could declare his/her will to convert to another one. In fact, some of those who declared to join Protestantism never did so, as for example the writer Peter Altenberg (1859–1919), who left Judaism in 1900, remained without any denomination until 1910, and then was baptised Catholic. Due to these unreliabilities, one has to handle the data of *Statistische Jahrbücher* with care (pp. 32–35, 154–155).

6 For Siegfried Lipiner's conversions, see also Schweighofer 2015: 72.

7 See Staudacher's *Bemerkungen zur Selektiven Edition* (Staudacher 2004b: 7).

8 See, for example, Diemling 2007; Schweighofer 2015.

9 We get information on: name, name of parents, date and place of birth, date and place of baptism, maiden name, godmother/godfather, address, possible weddings, etc. (Staudacher 2004a: 20–21, 26).

In chapter 2 (pp. 59-105), entitled “The Conversion” (*Die Konversion*), Staudacher first outlines the historical and legal framework of conversions between Judaism and Christianity during the nineteenth century (pp. 59-70). The Interdenominational Law (*Interkonfessionellengesetz*) from 1868 was an important caesura, since it was no longer permitted only to convert from Judaism to Christianity (Catholicism/Protestantism), but also from Christianity to Judaism. Moreover, one could leave a religious community and remain without any denomination. Religious changes in both directions increased from 1868 onwards, especially those from Judaism to Protestantism. After the historical overview, the author examines the phenomenon of “baptismal tourism” (*Tauftourismus*) (pp. 70-77)—meaning that people came to Vienna from other regions of the Habsburg-monarchy, or from abroad (e.g., Germany, Russia, England, France, Turkey, United States, etc.), in order to be baptised. Next she analyses the residential districts of Viennese converts (pp. 77-83), gives examples of conversions of couples or even whole families (pp. 83-86), and finally turns to the motives for converting from Judaism to Protestantism between 1782 and 1914 (pp. 86-105). According to Staudacher, love, interpersonal relationships, and anti-Semitism were the main motives for baptism, whereas religious belief played only a minor role. On the latter, Staudacher also talks about mission to the Jews in Vienna (pp. 86-91). She points out that, before 1848, Jews often converted to Christianity because they were allowed to stay free of charge in Vienna during the time of the required baptismal instruction (normally six weeks) and acquired civil rights once baptised (pp. 61-62, 87, 97-98). Since marriages between Jews and Christians were illegal in Austria, many converted in order to get married—hence the often very close time-lag between conversion and marriage—whereas others were baptised together with their children (not necessarily on the same day) for the purpose of family cohesion, or allowing their children to be baptised to save them from future difficulties. We also find siblings baptised together on the same day (pp. 83-84, 90-92, 95). From the 1880s onwards, anti-Semitism became a strong motive for conversion and name change. For the last decade of the nineteenth century, Staudacher registers more and more re-entries to Judaism, a fact she explains by the ‘ineffectiveness’ of baptism and name change in view of the increase of anti-Semitic insults (pp. 98-103). At the end of Chapter II, the author investigates the correlation between conversion and professional career and asserts that the latter as a motive may have played a role primarily for converts under the age of 40 (pp. 104-105).

When Staudacher almost excludes religious belief as a motive for baptism, she obviously relies only on the data and sources she used for her study. However, she did not take into account other documents (e.g., per-

sonal documents such as diaries or letters) that show very well that ‘religiousness’—understood not only as religious belief bound to the church, but in a broader sense as an inner sensibility—was an important factor in conversions from Judaism to Protestantism (and probably also to Catholicism) in Vienna around 1900 (Schweighofer 2015).

Chapter 3 (pp. 107-175) deals with name changes. Persons baptised received a baptismal name and were entitled to change their family name. After 1868, name changes were in some cases also granted without conversion to Christianity. According to this, name change was definitely a reason why Jews got baptised (pp. 110, 113, 119, 141). Both baptism and name change were motivated by the increasing anti-Semitism. Converts wanted to get rid of their ‘Jewish-sounding’ names and their Jewish backgrounds in order not to endanger, for example, their professional advancement, or to save themselves (or their children) from anti-Semitic insults (pp. 141-142). Furthermore, Staudacher presents a list of prominent converts (actors, authors, journalists, musicians, etc.) who changed their names, traces the correlation between baptism, name change, and ennoblement, and analyses how Jewish and non-Jewish encyclopaedias and biographies handle conversions and name changes of prominent persons. While Jewish encyclopaedias usually do not mention a change of religion, non-Jewish ones do not note the Jewish origin of a person. Name changes are also seldom pointed out in both types of encyclopaedias (pp. 156-175).

Chapter 4 (pp. 177-231) focuses on the converts’ godfathers and godmothers. In the Protestant churches, it was often the sexton who acted as godfather (in contrast to the Roman-Catholic Church), as well as pastors, relatives, wives/husbands, parents, friends, or other converts. The author gives an overview of the godmothers’/godfathers’ professions—including comparisons/parallels to the Roman-Catholic Church—and provides an interesting list of famous godmothers/godfathers with their converts, and one of famous converts with their godmothers/godfathers (for the lists, see pp. 211-231).

In Chapter 5 (pp. 233-286), Staudacher analyses the social structure of converts from Judaism to Protestantism. She first looks at age, sex, and family status, establishing that most of the converts were under 45 and unmarried (pp. 233-238). She then investigates the converts’ geographical origins—most of them were born in Vienna and Hungary; those who were born abroad often came from Russia or Germany—and their social status and profession, underlining that baptism and professional career were usually not linked to each other (pp. 238-286). When Staudacher talks about ‘intellectuals’ (*Intellektuelle*) (e.g., graduates, students, teachers, architects, engineers, etc.) and persons engaged in the cultural sector (*Kulturschaf-*

fende) (authors, painters, actors, musicians, etc.), we encounter a large number of ‘prominent names’ among the converts, such as Alfred Adler (1870–1937), Victor Adler (1852–1918), Egon Friedell (1878–1938), Heinrich Gomperz (1873–1942), Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), Lise Meitner (1878–1968), Hans Leo Prizibram (1874–1944), Josef Redlich (1869–1936), Elise Richter (1865–1943), Alice Schalek (1874–1956), Otto Weininger (1880–1903), Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871–1942), to name just a few (for the names, see pp. 255–285). However, why Staudacher groups academics and students together as intellectuals with, for example, engineers, and how she differentiates this group of ‘intellectuals’ from the one consisting of persons engaged in the cultural sector, remains unclear. Egon Friedell, for example, is mentioned in both groups (pp. 258, 283). Thus, it must be asked whether he is included among the ‘intellectuals’ or those in the cultural sector. Following Staudacher, 8.8% were persons engaged in the cultural sector, whereas 17.7% were ‘intellectuals’ (the percentage is presumably based on a base value of 3,080 adult converts) (pp. 241–242).

This last aspect leads to a shortcoming of Staudacher’s work, namely her charts. They do not indicate any base values. So, unfortunately, we never know the precise number of persons about whom the author is speaking. Numerical data in the text are not clearly assignable to the charts.

Staudacher enriches the text of volume 1 with numerous individual examples, and thus, generates a vivid image. Nevertheless, the countless examples, extending over several pages, sometimes disrupt the flow of reading. In the foreword, the author states that she did not have any assistance in her work and that she was under great time pressure (p. 8). It is therefore not surprising that the text contains some redundancies and is not always linguistically correct.

Overall, Staudacher’s work is quite impressive. The study amasses an extraordinary wealth of sources, which are highly important and valuable for further biographic, prosopographic, and cultural-historical research.

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