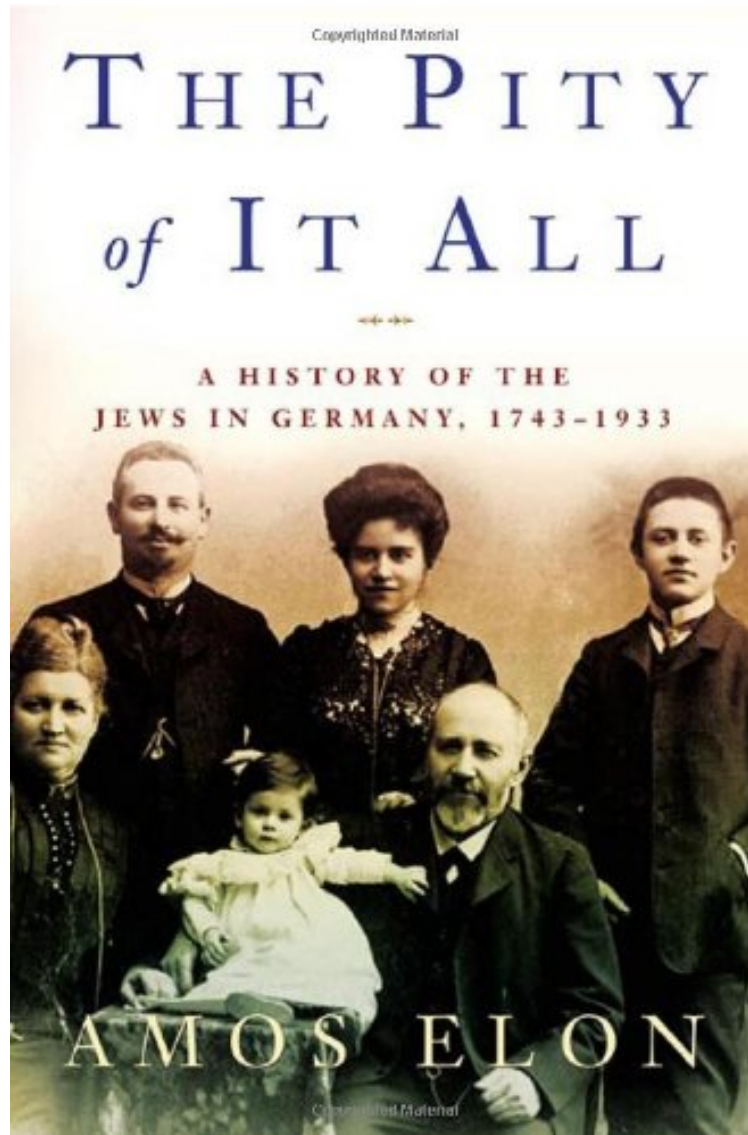


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The Pity of It All: A History of the Jews in Germany, 1743-1933

Amos Elon

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Amos Elon : The Pity of It All: A History of the Jews in Germany, 1743-1933 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Pity of It All: A History of the Jews in Germany, 1743-1933:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Exhaustive, Erudite but Somewhat One-Sided. By R. SELIG The progress of Jews toward full acceptance in the society of Germany and Austria--or at least Vienna--is traced thoroughly and at length. Writers, politicians, artists and industrialists, all are met here. Of some figures--those of

peculiar importance or eccentricity--a whole biography is written. Others are mentioned almost in passing, never to be heard of again. The unique role of the **HofJude** (court Jew) and the **KaiserJude** (Emperor's Jew), these being close to power without actually wielding it, is well explained for readers in democratic America. The one weakness in the book lies in its failure adequately to explain how things went from sugar to s---t so quickly. It's an account of steady gains, almost a mutual love affair between the Jews who contributed so much and the society that valued them like none other, then suddenly, in the final chapter, it's all taken away and the Jews must flee for their lives as Hitler and the Nazis come to power. There is a bit more to the story but you will read little of it here. Even the most sympathetic chronicler has acknowledged that along with the flowering of art, literature and theater during the Weimar Republic came a fair amount of decadence and depravity. Many sectors of German society, those from the rural areas especially, were deeply offended by what went on in smart-set Berlin in the twenties, and by the alienated political commentary of some Jewish writers of the time which was intended to wound and did so. Perhaps little of this was perceived at the time. Elon seems hardly to perceive it in retrospect, devoting all of two sentences on the second to last page to the excesses of the Weimar period.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book chronicles the difficult arrival of Moses Mendelsohn into Berlin as a poor and low cast Jew through his years of struggle and education to high highly respected position at his death. The rise of particularly Berlin Jewry though the 19th and early 20th century is revealed in beautiful prose. The respect, wealth and assimilation brought to German Jews is forthrightly declared. Their loyalty in World War I to the Kaiser is not surprising as their assimilation and recognition proved them proud Germans, though less Jewish. The writing is easy and interesting to read more like a good novel though the text is factually correct.. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in Jewish history or the position of Jews in Germany prior to the rise of Hitler.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very good

By Victoria Wilkerson
Loved it

From an acclaimed historian and social critic, a passionate and poignant history of German Jews from the mid-eighteenth century to the eve of the Third Reich. As it's usually told, the story of the German Jews starts at the end, with their tragic demise in Hitler's Third Reich. Now, in this important work of historical restoration, Amos Elon takes us back to the beginning, chronicling a period of achievement and integration that at its peak produced a golden age second only to the Renaissance. Writing with a novelist's eye, Elon shows how a persecuted clan of cattle dealers and wandering peddlers was transformed into a stunningly successful community of writers, philosophers, scientists, tycoons, and activists. He peoples his account with dramatic figures: Moses Mendelssohn, who entered Berlin in 1743 through the gate reserved for Jews and cattle, and went on to become "the German Socrates"; Heinrich Heine, beloved lyric poet who famously referred to baptism as the admission ticket to European culture; Hannah Arendt, whose flight from Berlin signaled the end of the German-Jewish idyll. Elon traces how this minority--never more than one percent of the population--came to be perceived as a deadly threat to national integrity, and he movingly demonstrates that this devastating outcome was uncertain almost until the end. A collective biography, full of depth and compassion, *The Pity of It All* summons up a splendid world and a dream of integration and tolerance that, despite all, remains the essential ennobling project of modernity.

From Publishers Weekly
In his excellent overview, veteran Israeli journalist and historian Elon (a biographer of Herzl and others) writes in a fluid and appealing style, with a talent for capturing the right anecdote or quote. He focuses on individual figures, both well-known ones such as Heine, Marx (both of whom converted to Protestantism) and Herzl, and lesser-knowns such as Ludwig Sonnemann (a newspaper editor who excoriated Bismarck's 1871 annexation of Alsace and Lorraine), Kurt Eisner (head of a short-lived socialist republic in Bavaria in 1919) and Walter Rathenau (the assimilated foreign minister who was assassinated in 1922). Like other historians of German Jewry, Elon points to the leadership of Jews in bringing the Enlightenment to Germany and to their high rate of assimilation and intermarriage (by the 1920s, the intermarriage rate of German Jewry rivaled that of America today). Fortunately, Elon avoids the trap of seeing all of pre-Nazi German-Jewish history as a prelude to the Holocaust or of viewing the "Final Solution" as inevitable. At the end of the 19th century, he argues effectively, "In most other European countries, prejudice and discrimination seemed equally or more prevalent" than in Germany. Elon's book is not without its shortcomings, such as focusing too much on Berlin and neglecting Jews in other cities, as well as rural and poor Jews, eastern European immigrants and women. But given these failings, this study will prove enlightening and enjoyable to those interested in both modern Jewish and modern German history.

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From Library Journal
German Jews were among the first in the modern era to attempt to be both Jewish and national simultaneously. Elon author of over half a dozen books on Jewish history argues that this fusion often caused dissonance, which manifested itself in a number of intellectual movements, from radical assimilation to Zionism. Elon re-creates the German Jewish intellectual world through collective biography, whereby individuals are chosen as archetypes to understand the challenges and accomplishments of the entire German Jewish community.

Such an approach can be dangerous, relying as it does on those who have left some sort of literary or political remnant. Elon, however, usually avoids this trap by focusing on the public side of German-Jewish life. Indeed, Elon's study charts a similar intellectual pattern to Ritchie Robertson's (*The Jewish Question in German Literature, 1749-1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents*). Unlike Robertson, who concentrated on its literary and philosophical manifestations, Elon examines a wider spectrum, including political and economic thought. Perhaps the most interesting chapter is "War Fever," which brings into stark contrast the responses of these various intellectual movements to total war in 1914. This work provides fascinating insight into the Jewish dilemma of coping with modernity. Recommended for most libraries. Frederic Krome, Jacob Rader Marcus Ctr. of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist This meticulously researched history begins with the reign of Frederick II and ends with the rise of Adolf Hitler. According to the author, the German Jews--never more than 1 percent of the population--never ceased in their efforts to merge German and Jewish identity. He cites their many contributions to literature, the arts, theology, politics, industry, and the natural sciences, and chronicles the lives of such eminent German Jews as Salman Schocken (founder of Schocken Books), poet Nachman Bialik, Nobel laureate Shmuel Agnon, Franz Kafka, Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Albert Einstein, and Moses Mendelssohn. Although their history is recounted as one in which--for most of the time--they suffered indignation and humiliation, culminating in the Holocaust, Elon writes: "We must see the German Jews in the context of their time and, at the very least, appreciate their authenticity, the way they saw themselves and others, often with reason. For long periods, they had cause to believe in their ultimate integration. It was touch and go almost to the end." George Cohen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved