

Gideon Reuveni, 2004-2005

Gideon Reuveni central research and teaching interest is the cultural and social history of Germany as well as modern Jewish history and the history of reading. His recent area of research is at the intersection of Jewish history and economics. Professor Reuveni is the author of *Reading Germany: The Commercialization of the Print and Consumer Culture in Germany before 1933* (Berghahn books) and the co-editor of *Jüdische Geschichte lesen. Texte der jüdischen Geschichtsschreibung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2003) and *Emancipation through Muscles: Jews in European Sport*, edited with Michael Brenner (forthcoming in University of Nebraska Press).

In the fall semester he will teach Weimar Culture and Society, an undergraduate seminar in the Department of History. During the spring semester, he will teach course he is developing on Jews in the Modern European Economy.

Jewish History Encounters Economy Workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Madison April 15-16, 2005

Jewish historiography generally tends to highlight religious, cultural and political aspects of the Jewish past more intensively than its economic features. This proclivity is all the more striking given the centrality of economics to Jewish life and to the image of Jews and Judaism in modern times. Indeed, the general image of the Jews is overloaded with patterns and emblems taken from the sphere of economics, resulting in an apparent "Jewish habitus". One of the most influential expressions of this attitude can be found in the works of the German sociologist Werner Sombart. Since the publication of his notorious book 'The Jews and Modern Capitalism' in 1911, research into Jewish economic life seems mainly to be preoccupied with attempt to refute or endorse his thesis concerning the special contribution of Jews to the rise of modern capitalism. Even today historians find it difficult to liberate themselves from the long shadow of Sombart's work.

The aim of the workshop will be to examine how "economy" challenges basic notions of Jewish identity and history. For this propose, the workshop will suggest that the term "economy" should not only refer to the involvement and/or activities of Jews related to the production and distribution of goods and services. Instead, it assumes a broader and more cultural oriented approach to economy. This approach seeks to explore the cultural significance and meanings of institutional structures -- the rules and arrangements by which people and society choose to employ scarce productive resources, in order to produce various commodities over time and to distribute them for consumption among various people and groups. This definition entails that the very coherence of the economy and its ability to function depends very much on the aptitude of people to interact, to allocate values and norms and on their willingness to share representations. The cultural significance of economy becomes evident when we examine Jewish history from this perspective. The field of economy appears to constitute a kind of a "third space" - to use Homi K. Bhabhah's terminology - an in-between space between the old binary oppositions of colonizers vs. colonized, oppressors and oppressed, where Jews closely interrelated with their non-Jewish environment while at the same time maintaining, willingly or unwillingly, an exclusive identity. The workshop will discuss the potential of such notions of

economy to Jewish history. It will welcome contributions which place economy at the centre of the modern Jewish experience and seek to confront central issues of Jewish history, such as assimilation and dissimilation, antisemitism and especially Jewish identity formation from a new perspective.