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**[Jütte, Daniel. The age of secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the economy of secrets, 1400-1800]**

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by zasluhovala. Autor, který se na McCutcheonovy variace specializuje dlouhodobě, znovu (po své první knize *Culture CriticoderCaretaker? Religionswissenschaft und die Funktion für die Gesellschaft: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Russell T. McCutcheon*, Marburg: Diagonal Verlag 2006, srov. recenzi knihy: *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 16/1, 2008, 133-136) ukázal, že tak jako má své nutné předpoklady studium dějin náboženství, má je rovněž práce v oblasti dějin religionistiky a metodologie vědy. Religionisté se sami vzdávají konzistence, kompaktnosti a vnitřní souvislosti svého oboru, pokud pokračují v praxi, kdy si každý vyrobí svou verzi nejen náboženství, ale především jejich religionistického poznání, nazve ji „teorií“ a dožaduje se její platnosti v rámci tzv. pluralismu metod a teorií. Aby byl možný pluralismus teorií religionistiky a metod tvorby religionistického vědění, musely by nejprve takové teorie a metody existovat. Jaké jsou jejich předpoklady, bez jejichž splnění nelze mluvit o vědeckých teoriích, se píše v každé jen trochu fundované učebnici teorie vědy a teorie poznání. Derridu a další socio-rétorické obraceče je možné nechat s pokojem; anebo ještě lépe, přečtème si několik jeho textů (je to něco jako procházka trikovým filmovým studiem), třeba *Písmo a rozdíl*, *Rozsev* nebo *Stopy: Nietzscheovy styly*, abychom si mohli udělat jasno každý pro sebe.

BŘETISLAV HORYNA

## Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800*,

New Haven: Yale University Press 2015, ix + 431 p.

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Daniel Jütte, in *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrecy, 1400-1800* (originally published in German as *Das Zeitalter des Geheimnisses: Juden, Christen und die Ökonomie des Geheimen (1400-1800)*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011, translated into English by Jeremiah Riemer), addresses a significant problem in the study of early modern thought and culture. Although, and perhaps because, many scholars trace the origins of modern science to this period, alternative strategies for the treatment of knowledge, which existed at the time, have become underrepresented in, or wholly left out of, the historical narrative. As a result, the roles certain groups and individuals played in the intellectual history of early modern Europe have been marginalized or even ignored, while others have been exaggerated due to their impact on the modern world.

Jütte recognizes that the intellectual history of this period roughly divides into two narratives, which often come into contact, but function according to radically different rules. The first tells the story of the theoretically orientated universities. In these hierarchical institutions professors lectured students on the basis of a set of commonly accepted assumptions. Although fierce discussion amongst professors and students did take place the point of departure remained highly theoretical and the basic assumptions were rarely questioned. The second narrative involved the artisans, craft workers and manual labourers who all competed against one another for the favours of rich patrons. Generally speaking, Jütte's "economy of secrets" refers to the world of craft work and

artisanship to which he connects the occult sciences and espionage. This world was ruled by the dynamics of supply and demand, and the capacity of an artisan to convince a wealthy prince, nobleman or merchant to finance his endeavours. This latter point is especially important for Jütte's analysis. Success in this highly competitive commercial world was related to the artisan's ability to convince a patron that the material effects he promised were (a) of some use to the patron, (b) rare enough to invest in and (c) could really be produced. Perception thus played a pivotal role.

As a result of fierce competition, artisans were forced, by circumstances, to keep, as far as the situation allowed, their methods secret while advertising the potential impact of the implementation of this knowledge. Secrecy, and the narratives which were connected to it, served to protect an artisan's intellectual property and to secure his employment. Paradoxically, publicly advertising the possession of secrets consequently functioned as a way of profiling oneself as an accomplished and highly valuable specialist. Daniel Jütte refers to this dynamic as the "economy of secrets" which he describes as follows: "Economy of secrets," then, refers to all activities that involve trading, offering, negotiating, delivering, exchanging, and buying secrets. Even more broadly, it refers to any overlap between those activities and the mercantile sphere, including mercantile rhetoric, in the early modern era" (p. 2).

In other words, Jütte is not so much interested in secrecy itself as in the added value a bit of information gains when presented under the cloak of secrecy. This dynamic is not unique to early modern Europe and has been studied in modern non-European cultures by the anthropologist Paul Christopher Johnson. Johnson dubbed this use of secrecy as a social and economic tool "secretism" and has shown that its use is relatively widespread (Paul Christopher Johnson, "Secretism and the Apotheosis of Duvalier", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74/2, 2006, 420-445; id., *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 2002).

It is therefore surprising that Jütte, in his otherwise incredibly well researched book wholly neglects to incorporate the concept of secretism or any of Johnson's reflections on the topic. Instead, Jütte derives his theoretical justification from Sissela Bok's observation that a secret involves "intentional concealment" (p. 10). Although it is hard to argue against this observation, it should be obvious that Jütte's concept of an "economy of secrecy" requires a theoretical foundation which answers to both the supply and demand sides of the equation.

Jütte carves out a dominant place in the trade in secrets for Jewish intellectual life in early modern Europe. In fact, his book feels more like an attempt to emphasise the importance of Jewish intellectuals in early modern history than a theoretical justification of the concept "economy of secrets". Jütte argues that, as a side effect of several relatively unrelated circumstances, Jewish intellectuals found a relatively easy entrance unto this intellectual marketplace. Firstly, Jütte demonstrates that it was rare for Jews to be admitted into one of the theoretically minded universities. This exclusion naturally led many Jewish intellectuals to the realm of craftwork and artisanship. In this highly competitive world the results one could deliver, or at least the results one could convincingly promise to deliver, carried much more weight than they did at the theoretically orientated universities. As such this field was more open to people from different backgrounds, including Jewish intellectuals (p. 12, 35).

Secondly, Jütte shows that the restrictions on, and suppression of, Jewish culture, which included expulsion, intimidation and discrimination, forced many, if not most, European Jews to employ at least a certain level of secrecy in their daily lives (p. 26-28). Especially Sephardic Jews were forced to conceal their religion and culture from their Christian neighbours (p. 26). As a result, they were not only very well acquainted with keeping secrets, but also gained a reputation amongst their Christian surroundings as a very secretive group. In fact, Christians often levelled allegations against Jews for being too secretive (p. 23).

The third ties in with the second in that Jews were regarded, by both Christians and Jews, as a people with a natural access to secret knowledge and rare exotic items. The first was connected to the Hebrew language which, being the language of the ancient Israelites, was regarded as a source of initial revelation and great spiritual power (p. 24). Knowledge of Hebrew and the Kaballah, the occult science which was based on the language, thus provided Jews with a direct link to primordial wisdom. The second was more practical and derived from the relatively close ties throughout the Jewish Diaspora, which allowed Jewish merchants to acquire, with relative ease, rare and exotic goods.

And finally, early modern Jews were frequently involved in professions such as money lending and the trade in jewellery and precious stones. These professions came with a natural incentive to secrecy, if only because of the high value of the goods which were traded (p. 27). In addition, these trades usually had connections to both craft work and the occult sciences. A coin maker or money lender for instance needed to be well acquainted with metallurgical techniques. Alchemical recipes would have been part of this knowledge. Similarly, a dealer in precious stones would have needed at least a basic understanding of the purpose these stones had in contemporary magic and astrology. Jütte demonstrates that the Jewish involvement in these sciences extended far beyond magic alone. Magic, through its ties with the Hebrew language and the Kabbalah, is recognised by most scholars as a field with many Jewish practitioners. Jewish involvement in alchemy and astrology has been awarded much less attention and, as a result, Jewish thinkers are gravely underrepresented in the historical narratives of these occult sciences (p. 37).

After this very well researched analysis of the Jewish involvement in the “economy of secrets” Jütte provides an impressive 107 page biography of the Italian Jewish intellectual Abramo Colorni. Colorni is often regarded as the Jewish Da Vinci and functions as a wonderful show case of a successful early modern Jewish intellectual. Thus far no comprehensive biography of Colorni has been on offer and Jütte’s work would be

a welcome contribution if only because of the chapter on Colorni.

The last chapter deals with the aftermath of the scientific revolution. To my opinion, Jütte’s most insightful observation, and the one that makes his argument come full circle, is introduced in this chapter. He draws attention to the relative absence of Jewish intellectuals from the historical narrative of the scientific revolution and its immediate aftermath. Despite the longstanding debate concerning this surprising absence, scholars seem not to be able to agree on an explanation for this anomaly, which is all the more striking because Jewish intellectuals made a formidable contribution to modern science in the nineteenth century. Jütte argues that this absence derives from the position Jewish thinkers took in early modern intellectuality. Their legitimacy and cultural identity were closely tied to the trade in concealed knowledge. Modern science on the other hand celebrates free accessibility and aims, like the early modern universities, to collect knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself. In effect, modern science incorporated practically applicable knowledge into the university portfolio. Within this new intellectual culture there was little space for the virtues which once gave Jewish intellectuals an edge over their Christian peers whereas many of the old prejudices against the Jews, which kept them from entering universities, did not fade away until much later. The relative absence of Jewish intellectuals from the early narrative of modern science should thus be sought in the decline of their traditional marketplace and the relative lack of accessibility of the new institutions of learning. This would also explain why, after an initial transition period, Jewish thinkers again popped up in the history of science and intellectuality by the nineteenth century.

Jütte’s book is a reworked version of his doctoral thesis for which he was awarded the PhD Thesis Prize of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism in 2011. It is incredibly well researched and provides the reader with a fresh and well balanced view of the Jewish participation in the early modern intellectual marketplace. However, although Jütte has obviously

spent a lot of effort in researching early modern Jewish intellectuals, his analysis fails to properly address the dynamics of the early modern trade in secrets. He devotes little space to the economic mechanisms at play in early modern Europe or the effects secrecy had on the demand for a certain bit of information. Consequently, his concept of an early modern “economy of secrets” remains rather vague and several important questions about it remain unanswered. Jütte, for instance, fails to address the way in which secrecy not only affected how the information was perceived but also how it effected people’s regard of the secret keeper. This is, in relation to early modern Jewish intellectuals, incredibly important as it ties in with the emphasis Jütte places on the Jewish reputation in the “economy of secrets”.

Another point where Jütte’s analysis falls short is in its treatment of Christian intellectuals in the “economy of secrets”. Even though it is obvious that Jütte is predominantly interested in Jewish participation in this economy, he provides very little

material for comparison. As a result it does not become clear from his book in how far the Jewish position in this economy differed, or did not differ, from its Christian counterpart. Jütte seems to suggest that Jewish intellectuals at least stood a fair chance at, and at best were better prepared for, employment in the economy of secrecy, but the lack of comparison leaves this question relatively open.

Overall, *The Age of Secrecy* is a must read for anyone with an interest in either the history of early modern Jewish intellectual life or the organisation of the early modern intellectual marketplace. Jütte’s insightful observations should be seen as an enormous leap forward in the study of early modern Jewish intellectuals and their role in the development of modern science. However, Jütte leaves several key questions unanswered and, as a result, the reader is left with the feeling that something fundamental is missing from his analysis.

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