

'Only the murder accusations are missing'

A case study of antisemitism and anti-antisemitism
in Gothenburg, 1849

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ABSTRACT • In 1848, the *Göteborgs Dagblad* newspaper was revived after a ten-year gap, and launched the anonymous submission column entitled 'Anonyma Lådan' (the Anonymous Box). In January and February 1849, many antisemitic letters and articles were published in the Swedish newspapers. Some letters defending Jews and Judaism were published in both 'Anonyma Lådan' and *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*. Short of blood libel, the antisemitic side accused Jews of typical anti-Jewish stereotypes: for example, greed, hypocrisy and Jewish hatred of Christianity. Anti-antisemitic writers proclaimed a Christian identity that was based on humanism, stating that one could not be a true Christian if one attacked and hated Jews and Judaism. The Jewish congregation in Gothenburg and the society Judiska Intresset (The Jewish Cause) both chose a non-engaged approach to the antisemitic attacks in the newspaper, since it was not respectable to engage in such debates and, in their view, it would only cause more anti-Jewish sentiments if they did so. In this article, it is argued that the reasons behind the attacks were societal changes, but also, more importantly, that with 'Anonyma Lådan', antisemitic sentiments found a platform where such sentiments could be freely expressed.

Introduction

Europe was in upheaval in 1848, with violent riots in Stockholm which took on anti-Jewish aspects. Two false allegations against the conservative politician August von Hartmansdorff, whose house was attacked by stone-throwing mobs, claimed that he had a part in dismantling the guild-system and lowering the import duties – which he allegedly did to strengthen Jewish traders (Berglund 2009: 356–64, 380; Valentin 1924: 398–9). In the protocols of the Jewish society Judiska Intresset (The Jewish Cause),¹ these

riots were only referred to as 'the events' (JFS A1b:1).² Gothenburg was a divided city, with a large poor population and an extremely wealthy upper class. Several Jewish families, such as Delbanco and Magnus, belonged to the wealthy elite (Christensen 2020: 43–5, 152). Even so, Gothenburg was spared from

against antisemitism. The organisation expanded to Gothenburg the same year. Over the course of a decade, it grew from initially six members to twenty-eight, twelve in Gothenburg and sixteen in Stockholm. The members constituted an intellectual elite of second-generation Swedish Jews. See further, for example, Carlesson Magalhães 2020.

1 Judiska Intresset was founded in Stockholm in 1841 as a secret Jewish organisation to fight for emancipation and

2 11.5.1850. All translations by author. All italics and boldface are in the original.

such upheavals – the few mass gatherings which did occur did not turn violent. Older research, the few studies exploring the topic, has more or less downplayed Gothenburgian antisemitism. For example, Per Nyström's definition of antisemitism makes this possible since he defines it as an intellectual ideology which implies that antisemitism only existed within the upper-class intelligentsia (Nyström 1980: 71–3).³ In Nyström (1980), we encounter a narrative depicting the working class as a harmonious group which bridged cultural differences through a form of community centred around class. Probably, as Christoph Leiska points out, this is due to Nyström's ideological base as well as the fact that much research at the time centred around class conflicts (Leiska 2012: 129).

In recent decades, some researchers have paid attention to antisemitism in nineteenth-century Gothenburg (e.g. Christensen 2020; Hammarlund 2013; Leiska 2016). Liberals in Gothenburg used tolerance as proof of their liberal ideals. By socialising with Jews, liberals could proudly proclaim they had Jewish friends, which then proved their high level of tolerance. However, Anders Hammarlund points out that even such famously liberal individuals as the newspaper publisher and politician Sven Adolf Hedlund, who often agitated for Jewish emancipation, sometimes reproduced negative stereotypes of Jews as dishonest (Hammarlund 2013: 266–70). This is also a point made by Leiska, who shows how antisemitism was present among liberals in Gothenburg; liberal toleration had its limits (Leiska 2012, 2016; see also Forst 2013: 378ff.).

This article will focus on the case of the *Göteborgs Dagblad* newspaper, in which

debates about 'the Jews' and a series of anti-semitic articles were published during January and February 1849. My main research centres on Jewish emancipation in Sweden. To fully comprehend what emancipation entailed for Swedish Jews, an understanding of the surrounding antisemitism is required (cf. Bredefeldt 2008: 33, 146). Thus, an exploration of antisemitism in Gothenburg during a period when many Swedish Jews fought for emancipation is called for to understand the context of their struggle. This is achieved by looking at *Göteborgs Dagblad* and the Jewish congregation's reaction to antisemitic material published in the newspaper. Two questions guide this case study: what were the main accusations against Jews, and, how did members of the Jewish congregation respond, and why? These questions allow us to explore the debates and how they were handled by the Jewish congregation in Gothenburg.

These instances of antisemitic outbursts were of course linked to the ongoing emancipation debates of the time (Valentin 1924: 396ff.). Just as in the rest of Europe, the change from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (cf. Tönnies 1979) affected Sweden. As the guild-based society of estates was being dismantled, frictions emerged in society, which often took on antisemitic aspects. For example, Zygmunt Bauman stresses how societal changes give rise to expressions of antisemitism (Bauman 1998), and as Frederick Beiser (2021) states, emancipation and antisemitism are explicitly linked through the 'Jewish question'. In the 1840s, the debates in Germany centred mainly on what emancipation would entail: civic rights only or political rights as well. Many liberals believed in inclusion and full rights, while most conservatives maintained the importance of Christian values for full citizenship (Beiser 2021). Even so, the liberal offer included the idea of adaptation of Judaism for it to become worthy of inclusion

3 For a more in-depth critique, see Hammarström 2007: 40–4; or, Andersson 2000: 173ff.

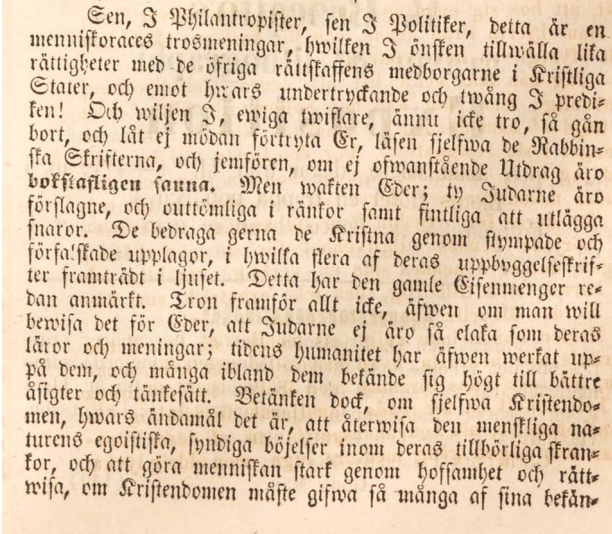
(Rürup 2016: 34–5). Jewish emancipation was part of the liberal transformation of society and a focal point for discussions about citizenship (Birnbau and Katznelson 1995). In the eyes of many critics of Jewish emancipation, the Jew was seen as the ‘anti-citizen’ – that is, the opposite of the ‘good’ citizen (Ulvund 2020).

In the Swedish case, Henrik Edgren shows that antisemitism during the so-called Jew-feud of 1815 was a political stance against radical societal changes (Edgren 2016), while Per Hammarström investigates how ‘the Jews’ could be used as a political tool (Hammarström 2016). Anti-modern sentiments were expressed through antisemitic discourse (Andersson 2000: 173–4; Johannesson 1988), and, in reaction to Enlightenment and Modernity, many thinkers used ‘the Jews’ to discuss societal changes. As Cordelia Heß’s study of antisemitic literature suggests, antisemitic ideas were widespread among the Swedish populace during the nineteenth century (Heß 2021). Furthermore, Jan Christensen stresses that antisemitic sentiments increased in Gothenburg in the 1840s and early 1850s because of the economic-liberal changes in society (Christensen 2020: 156). Could this be relevant as an explanatory factor in the present case too? The guild-system had been dismantled in 1846, a new corporation law introduced in 1848, and full freedom of trade was being discussed (later introduced in 1864) – the estate-based society was being demolished. Society was radically changing, which caused stress among portions of the population (cf. Bauman 1991). From the 1830s to the late 1840s, consumption changed, and new patterns emerged. Jewish traders in Gothenburg contributed to these changes through their extensive networks and import of goods – even Jewish traders of modest means imported wares directly from

Denmark, England and Germany (Brismark and Lundqvist 2015: 486–7, 499–506). This link to imports and a new consumer market could be yet another factor of societal change behind expressions of antisemitism surfacing in Gothenburg in early 1849. Another factor is the launch of the column ‘Anonyma Lådan’ (the Anonymous Box), which gave antisemitic sentiments a platform where they could be expressed.

Material and method

In this article, I will delve into the debates about Jews that took place in *Göteborgs Dagblad*’s anonymous submitter column entitled ‘Anonyma Lådan’; a series of antisemitic articles published in the same newspaper at the same time; the correspondence about the course of action between the two branches of *Judiska Intresset*; and, lastly, how members of the Jewish congregation in Gothenburg responded to the debate and the article series. Alongside the newspaper material from *Göteborgs Dagblad*, protocols and letters from the archives of the Jewish congregations



Sen, I Philantropister, sen I Politiker, detta är en
menniskoraces trosmeningar, hvilken I önsken tillwälla lika
rättigheter med de öfriga rättsaffens medborgarne i Kristliga
Stater, och emot hvaras undertryckande och tvång I predi-
ken! Och wiljen I, ewiga twiflare, ännu icke tro, så gån-
bort, och låt ej mödan förtvåta Er, låsen sjelfwa de Rabbin-
ska Skrifternas, och jemfören, om ej ofwänstående Utdrag äro
bokstafligen sanna. Men waiken Eder; ty Judarne äro
förslagne, och outtömliga i ränkor samt förtliga att utlägga
sinaror. De bedraga gerna de Kristina genom sympade och
förfaflade upplagor, i hwilka flera af deras uppbyggelseskris-
ter framträd i ljuset. Detta har den gamle Eisenmenger re-
dan anmärkt. Iron framför allt icke, äfwen om man will
bewisa det för Eder, att Judarne ej äro så elaka som deras
läror och meningar; tidens humanitet har äfwen werkat up-
på dem, och många ibland dem bekände sig högt till bättre
åfsigter och tänkesätt. Betänken dock, om sjelfwa Kristendo-
men, hwaras ändamål det är, att återwisa den menskliga na-
turens egoistiska, syndiga böjelsjer inom deras tillbörliga fran-
kor, och att göra människan stark genom hoffsamhet och rätt-
wisa, om Kristendomen måste gifwa så många af sina bekän-

‘Judendomen’ (Judaism), cutting from *Göteborgs Dagblad*, 31.1.1849: 3. Svenska dagstidningar, National Library of Sweden.

of Gothenburg and Stockholm are analysed as well as protocols from Poliskammaren (the Police Chamber) in Gothenburg.

A textual analysis has been employed – focusing on reasoning, stereotypes and ideas presented in the material. To gather together the debates and the article series, I have used the database ‘Svenska dagstidningar’ (Swedish daily newspapers) of the National Library of Sweden. Two methods have been used. Firstly, browsing issues from January and February, and secondly, search words: *jud** (which includes *judisk* (Jewish), *judendom* (Judaism), etc.) and *jude* (Jew). Regarding the protocols, the material chosen is directly related to the case of *Göteborgs Dagblad* and legal proceedings regarding the case which sparked the debate (see below). Before we delve into the case, some concepts will be briefly discussed.

Concepts

Even though in Sweden, compared to Europe at large, antisemitism is a somewhat understudied topic, especially in the era of emancipation, c. 1780–1870 (Heß 2020: 9), there are some studies highlighting antisemitism in the Swedish press in the nineteenth century (e.g. Johannesson 1988; Heß 2018). Many scholars, such as Julie Kalman, have argued that antisemitism is an anachronistic term and prefer not to use it (Kalman 2010). Some have suggested the use of the term *anti-Judaism* instead (Nirenberg 2013), but as Jonathan Elukin points out, this term is often applied haphazardly and without much consensus in the scholarly community on what it actually refers to (Elukin 2021). This article investigates a debate in which one side can be classified by the analytic concept *antisemitism*. Since antisemitism is an analytic concept, it can be defined in either broad or narrow terms (the latter is exemplified

above by Nyström’s definition). There are many such definitions and little consensus among scholars (Weiser 2021: 8–10), but I will confine myself to a rather broad definition: resentment towards Jews, in particular ‘the Jews’, and Judaism (Bauman 1989: 34) – infused, moreover, by conspiracy theories (Byford 2021: 79–83).

The debate had different sides to it, for debates need to have at least two sides, and in the opposing corner we find Christian voices arguing against prejudices and hatred towards Jews. *Philosemitism* is a concept nearly as old as its negative equivalent and was used to condescendingly classify people as ‘Jew-friendly’ (Fischer 2011). Just as antisemitism is taken from its roots in racism and used as an analytical concept, philosemitism can be used to describe the sides which argued in favour of Jews (Rubinstein and Rubinstein 1999; Samuels 2021). Of course, this means redacting the stereotyping aspects of philosemitism, that is, the positive stereotypes of Jews implied by the concept. Therefore, the concept *anti-antisemitic* is preferable, since it does not imply that rejecting antisemitic prejudices was based in a positive stereotyping of Jews.

Now that we have briefly outlined these important concepts, we turn to the newspaper *Göteborgs Dagblad*, its submitter column and its editor, Charles Henri Backman, before delving into the debate and the reaction from the congregation and its members.

Göteborgs Dagblad and ‘Anonyma Lådan’

Göteborgs Dagblad was founded in 1828 by the wholesaler Pehr Backman and was taken over by his son, the French vice-consul Charles Henri Backman, the following year. In 1838, it was incorporated into *Göthen den andre*. The same year, the newspaper was one of few (if not the only one) to re-

publish the Blood Libel accusations made in *Aftonbladet i Stockholm* (*Göteborgs Dagblad* [GD] 7.3.1838: 2). A decade later, in 1848, *Göteborgs Dagblad* was resurrected with Charles Backman as editor and C. Petersen as publisher. However, it was to be short-lived, and was cancelled again in the heat of the ongoing debate, with the 28 February 1849 issue being the last (Lundstedt 1895–1902).

The two main contributors, besides the editor Charles Backman, were the student Mauritz Liberg and the watchmaker Carl Damm, the latter thus belonging to the category of craftsmen (Lundstedt 1895–1902). In the first issue of the resurrected newspaper, an announcement, written by the publisher C. Petersen, stated that *Göteborgs Dagblad* was going to fully launch in mid-June and would publish in a ‘liberal spirit’ without belonging to any political ideology, fight for truth and justice, and ‘above all else love the fatherland and our citizens’. Furthermore, Petersen proclaimed the intention to launch the debate page ‘Anonyma Lådan’, since freedom of speech and, especially, free discussions were the newspaper’s main guiding principles. Petersen therefore encouraged readers to suggest articles and other works that could be suitable for publication (GD 2.6.1848: 1–3).

Göteborgs Dagblad published articles and letters in ‘Anonyma Lådan’ in favour of extended male suffrage and workers’ rights, in which radical reform societies were described as not radical enough in regards to their propositions for voting rights (e.g. GD 22.6.1848: 2–3; 22.6.1848: 3–4; 16.8.1848: 2), and when reporting about violence committed by workers in Gothenburg, the newspaper suggested that these should organise in guilds to gain and maintain control and dampen violence (GD 15.7.1848: 2). One of Judiska Intresset’s members in Stockholm, Ludvig Hartvig, claimed that *Göteborgs Dagblad* mostly had influence among,



Charles Henri Backman (1801–60), the editor of *Göteborgs Dagblad*, painting from 1832. Gothenburg City Museum.

and was read by, ‘the less fortunate of the craftsmen class’ (JFS A1a:8).⁴ During this period, workers increasingly came from the lower strata of craftsmen (Berglund 2009: 353), and it was usually in these circles that antisemitic sentiments were expressed with violence (Carlsson 2021: 86).

In a footnote to a letter published in the newspaper, the editorial office proclaimed itself to be liberal (GD 30.8.1848: 1) and in an announcement, the impartiality of ‘Anonyma Lådan’ was emphasised (GD 18.12.1848: 1). On the other hand, a lengthy article was published in the last issue, lamenting the state of the Swedish church and the State’s treatment of Christianity, in which

4 Letter from Ludvig Hartvig to Axel Lamm. Gothenburg 26.1.1849. Attachment to Protocol 173. 12.2.1849. Stockholm.

the author proclaimed that nothing, especially not a state, should be built according to any current *Zeitgeist* (GD 28.2.1849: 2–3). The article is a sign of a conservative stance, warning against rapid societal change and especially following current whims as radicals allegedly did.

How then should the political stance of *Göteborgs Dagblad* be classified? Firstly, conservative ideas were propagated; secondly, the editorial office claimed to be liberal; and thirdly, articles and letters propagating workers' rights were published in the newspaper. A wealth of ideas from different ideologies and perspectives thrived side by side in *Göteborgs Dagblad*, making it difficult to answer the question of political categorisation: thus, the conclusion is that the political standpoint of *Göteborgs Dagblad*, its editor, publisher and editorial board, was characterised by ambivalence (cf. Bauman 1991).

Now, we will turn our focus to this debate and the different ways in which members of the Jewish congregation in Gothenburg tried to handle the situation. It is important not to blow this debate out of proportion. When scrutinising the number of pseudonyms, the number of authors professing antisemitic ideas was not great. All in all, in this particular debate, there were four: Jacobi Filius,⁵ Marcus and two completely anonymous, choosing to not use any signature at all. The number is rivalled by the anti-antisemitic writers: Moritz, Petrus, Qwintus and one anonymous.

Already in October 1848, not long after the launch of the debate page, a letter was published, ridiculing Jewish '*Bildung*, humanism and patriotism (!)' and exhibited phrases such as 'the public (which the Jews, humanely enough, label "die verfluchten Schweden" when some Swede succeeds in

defeating their ingenuity)' (GD 13.10.1848: 2–3).⁶ A response soon came, in which the writer was said to have been greatly upset by the harshness of the attacks against Jews, calling out 'Mister Jew-hater' as blind to progress (GD 17.10.1848: 3). This exchange foreshadowed what was to come.

The debate

The debate began when a Jewish matron mistreated her Christian maid, Johanna Sophia Petersson. The first description of this event is to be found in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* (GHT) on 22 December 1848, regarding a legal process between the maid and the head of the family she had served. According to GHT, the story was 'quite amusing'. It was also stated that the matron in question often had issues and legal cases with her maids:

during her time of service at the M–s, she had nothing else to eat than the bones from the fish the gentlefolks had eaten; and that she only tasted *butter and bread*, when she was ordered to *chew it* for her matron's *favourite little bitch*, which however always happened three times a day. (GHT 22.12.1848: 3)

Nowhere is it mentioned that the M–s family was Jewish. Even though *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* did not publish the full name, it was obvious to people reading the notice at the time that it referred to a Jewish family of some standing. The family in question was the Meyers, and Petersson had only been in their service for three weeks before she absconded from her service,

6 'German', and the German language, was often linked to Jews in the Swedish press, see Müssener 2021.

5 The signature translates as 'son of Jacob'.

for which Meyer, a drawing teacher (Swe. *ritmästare*), brought the case before the Police Chamber, whose protocols in large parts corroborate the notice in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* (GPK AI:56).⁷ The first attack, written under the pseudonym Jacobi Filius, soon followed.

The claim that the matron, among other things, had forced the maid to chew food for an old female dog, was interpreted as Jews regarding Christians as inferior beings to dogs. Explicitly, to ‘use a poor Christian maid to chew food for a bitch’ was seen as ‘a mockery, a scorn, to humiliate a Christian, who is forced to serve the Jews, when among themselves no one needs to serve, thanks to the rights they already enjoy within society, and whereby they are still not satisfied’ (GD 2.1.1849: 3). Other classic antisemitic charges were brought up, such as greed, hypocrisy during Sabbath – forcing Christians to do their chores – and contempt for Christians. Jacobi even references Christian Petter Löwe’s *Speculum religionis Judaicae* from 1732 (see Nyman 1988) as proof of Christian hate (GD 4.1.1849: 2–3; 8.1.1849: 3).

In a later letter published in ‘Anonyma Lådan’, Jacobi Filius was identified as a

7 Her reasons for leaving her service were mistreatment but above all that she did not get enough to eat and had to buy her own food, according to her statements before the Police Chamber – allegations which Meyer rejected. After hearing several witnesses – neighbours and former employees – of whom most corroborated Petersson’s story, especially that she did not get enough to eat, the Police Chamber decided that she did not have to go back into service at the Meyers’, since Meyer himself did not want to re-employ her. However, the Police Chamber told Meyer that he could sue in a court if he wanted compensation. Protocols 16.12.1848, 23.12.1848, 30.12.1848, 3.1.1849, 10.1.1849 (GPK AI:56, 57).

Jew who had converted to Christianity by a person who signed his anti-antisemitic debate letter Petrus. Petrus questioned the sincerity of Jacobi’s conversion and Christian faith since he did not adhere to the principle of loving thy neighbour, and thus, did not love God. Jacobi was criticised for claiming to be Christian, since Christians do not speak ill of Jews, according to Petrus (GD 16.1.1849: 3–4). In his answer, Jacobi professed distaste for Petrus for revealing Jacobi’s conversion since it was an anonymous debate. Furthermore, he differentiated between sincere converts and conversions for material gains, implicitly placing himself in the former category. Jacobi compared the latter, whom he asserted continued to practise Judaism, to Judas, and claimed that true converts were being persecuted by Jews, exemplifying this with a man who had been ostracised by his family to the point of attempting suicide (GD 19.1.1849: 3–4).

Jacobi’s antisemitic articles could possibly fall under what has been labelled ‘Jewish self-hatred’ – a term often associated with Jews who express antisemitic views – by previous research.⁸ Whether or not Jacobi had converted to Christianity from Judaism because of some animosity towards Jewish tradition is uncertain. What is certain, however, is his explicit antisemitism, which in turn made anti-antisemitic writers discredit his Christian identity.

8 The literature on the subject is vast and the term itself is contested (see Goldberg 2021). Zygmunt Bauman suggests self-hatred is a part of conversion (which he dubs ‘the bait of social promotion and ultimately acceptance’), insisting that this acceptance comes ‘at the price of admitting first one’s own inferiority’, which Bauman in turn links to a possible development of self-hatred (Bauman 1991: 73).

An anti-antisemitic writer, Moritz, advised Jacobi to not tar everyone with the same brush, urging him to settle whatever score he had with individual Jews instead of attacking Jews as a group. Further, he asserted that malicious matrons could be found also among Christians, proclaiming that we are all human, and thus nobody is without fault. This was also an idea propagated by the anonymous anti-antisemitic writer who pointed out that some Christian families had been helped financially by Jews. Moritz further implored Jacobi to be impartial, 'especially if you are a Renegade [convert], since every right-minded Christian will see that it is a question of **individual hate** and a terrible driving force that lies behind your behaviour as accuser and Jew-hater'. Lastly, Moritz urged Jacobi to come out of the shadows, since he deserved nothing but contempt for his anonymity (GD 4.1.1849: 2; 10.1.1849: 3-4). Another writer, Qvintus, argued that the surrounding social conditions forced Jews to work on the Sabbath, and stated that he defended Jews in the name of Christianity and Humanism, not because he was himself a Jew (GD 5.1.1849: 3; 10.1.1849: 3).

Those who defended Judaism and Jews proclaimed themselves to be enlightened and liberal Christians – echoing what Leiska describes as liberals often professing their tolerance of Jews to show their high level of liberalism (Leiska 2012). In all anti-antisemitic texts, we see the idea of anti-semitism as un-Christian propagated. All of them blamed Jacobi for not being a true Christian, in light of his intolerant views. The defenders propagated the idea that hating Jews was un-Christian, which was a common stance in the fight against antisemitism in Germany in the late nineteenth century (Suchy 1983: 205ff.). Standing up for Jews and Jewish rights was thus not only seen as a liberal ideal, but also as a Christian duty.

However, it was not only Jacobi that wrote antisemitic letters in 'Anonyma Lådan'.

'The Jews do not care what the "Goys" are saying about them', claimed one writer with the pseudonym Marcus. He was curious about the fact that Backman actually published the antisemitic letters from Jacobi and others since it 'was well known' that 'the Jews' controlled the press, and everything else, in Gothenburg. 'The lords of this city', meaning 'the Jews', would not condone such behaviour, according to Marcus, who foretold that *Göteborgs Dagblad* would soon be shut down because of the accusations made in 'Anonyma Lådan' (GD 23.1.1849: 3-4). Here we see clear tendencies of conspiracy-theory thinking; 'the Jews' were thought to be in control of Gothenburg.

One of the anonymous writers acknowledged the liberal spirit and justice in the idea of Jewish emancipation, which appealed to human rights. However, it was also stated that Judaism in itself, which forbade 'amalgamation' (i.e. assimilation), was the main reason Jewish emancipation was incompatible with a liberal state. Furthermore, the question of emancipation of Jews should first be discussed after the question of representation had been settled. Discussing 'the Jewish question' instead of representation was likened to giving foreigners precedence in Swedish matters. The writer also claimed that it was certain that all nations would be enslaved if representation and rights were given to 'the Jews' (GD 13.1.1849: 3; 15.1.1849: 3) – a claim which also bears the hallmarks of conspiracy theory.

Backman wrote some interesting notices, proclaiming he could not publish all the letters about 'the Jews' arriving at the editorial office, since there was no room for them at the time, but emphasised that the authors should rest assured of publication in due time (GD 17.1.1849: 4). However, a month

later, Backman also claimed that he had been criticised for making room for 'the Jews' in *Göteborgs Dagblad*, since news about Jews already made up most of the columns in other Gothenburgian newspapers, according to his critics – referring to ongoing debates about religious freedom and Jewish emancipation. Furthermore, Backman wrote that many articles about Jews were of the kind not suitable for publication, and he therefore found it necessary to reject several texts (GD 14.2.1849: 4). Whether or not this was some form of pretence of impending attacks is uncertain. What we can be certain of is *Göteborgs Dagblad*'s sudden demise by the end of February 1849. Some articles were surely never published, as was also the case with an antisemitic article series published at the same time.

Could it be that the antisemitic writers belonged to the craftsmen of the burgher estate? Up until about this time, opposition against Jewish rights had been strong in the burgher estate in the Riksdag (Parliament), which began to change in the 1840s. Hugo Valentin partly explains this on the basis that the burgher estate in Parliament came to be dominated by the upper strata of the bourgeois and the intelligentsia, instead of craftsmen (Valentin 1924: 396ff.). Craftsmen were heavily affected by the dismantling of the estate society and saw Jews as competition. Now, when the obligation of belonging to a guild had been removed in 1846, crafts were more available for Jews. Furthermore, the riots in Stockholm in 1848 reveal contradictory positions, with chants both for and against the upheaval of the guild-system as well as for even greater reforms – it is therefore difficult to establish any clear motives behind the riots. Most of the people killed by the military in relation to the riots were workers, who composed an increasing portion of craftsmen, and lower bourgeois

(Berglund 2009: 353, 380–1). Additionally, if one compares Hamburg, for example, Moshe Zimmermann points out that antisemitism was common among craftsmen during the mid-nineteenth century (Zimmermann 1979: 15). At the same time, Jewish organisations, such as Judiska Intresset and Israelitiska Ynglingaföreningen (Israelite Youth Association), encouraged young Jewish men to seek work in crafts, just as was done in other European countries, such as Germany and England (Penslar 2001: 114–22). Here, we find a possible conflict which may be one of the factors behind this debate.

'Jews are bad, but Judaism even worse'

At the same time as the debate was raging in 'Anonyma Lådan', *Göteborgs Dagblad* published a series of articles portraying Judaism, and especially the Talmud, as an abomination. The introductory article proclaimed that it would, in the following articles, show Christian propagators of Jewish emancipation how misled they were. One way this was 'shown' was through Talmudic 'quotations' published in four articles in a series of seven, entitled 'Judendomen' (Judaism). More would have been published if *Göteborgs Dagblad* had endured, since the seventh and last article ends with a statement that it would continue in another issue.

With these articles, *Göteborgs Dagblad* began attacking Judaism as a whole. According to the directors of the Jewish congregation in Gothenburg, these articles were gathered from a brochure published in Linköping in 1822. This brochure was a translation of the work of the Protestant theologian Christian Frank from 1816, mainly derived from Johann Andreas Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judenthum* from 1700 (Heß 2021: 80–3; see also Katz 1980: 13–15). Eisenmenger was referenced to prove that Judaism was a dangerous and

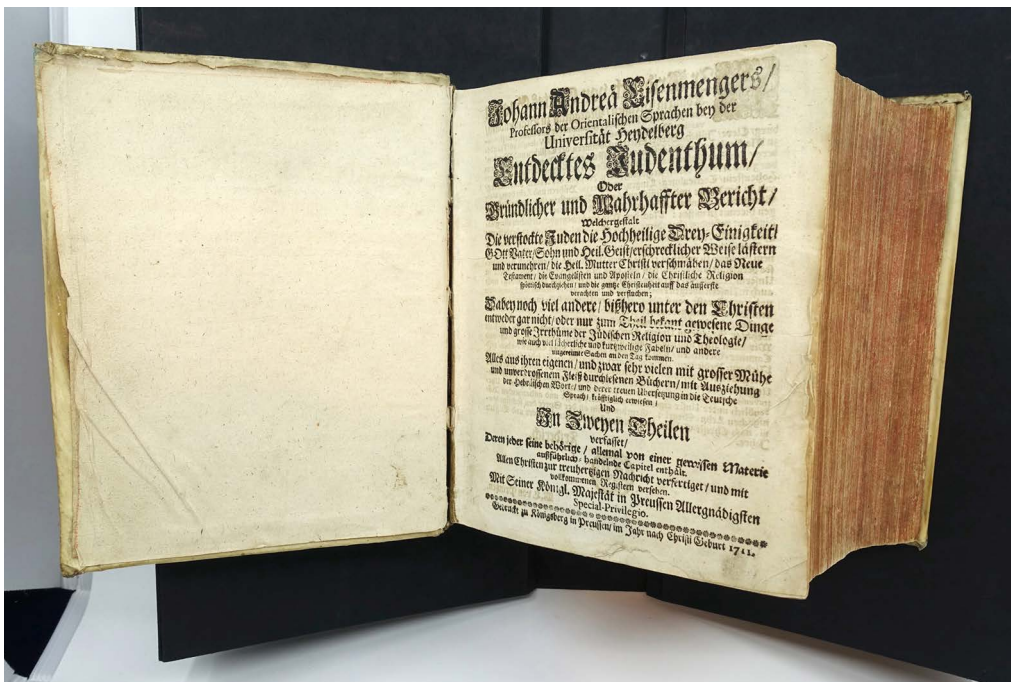
abominable religion and Jewish deception was a long-since proven fact.

The first article began with the line ‘Jews are bad, but Judaism even worse’, which was attributed to Frank (GD 26.I.1849: 3). The following two articles were passages allegedly showing Jewish hostility towards Christianity, while the main argumentation began with the fourth article: ‘Look, you philanthropists, look you politicians, these are the beliefs of a human race, which you wish to unrightfully bestow equal rights on’ (GD 3 I.I.1849: 3).

One accusation made in the articles was that Jews were raised to hate Christianity – reminiscent of Löwe’s claims from 1732 (Nyman 1988: 156). ‘Innocence and childhood cannot survive beside the hatred in which the Jew is born and raised’, one article stated, which further declared that ‘Christianity must, to the Jews, remain an aversion and a madness. Or would they yet again become children, who at the mother’s breast drank

bile instead of milk?’ (GD 1.2.1849: 4). There are several other claims allegedly showing how Judaism was an ‘abomination’ to Christians in the article series. Suffice it to say that, short of blood libel accusations, they consist of typical antisemitic allegations against Jews and Judaism.

Why did Backman decide to publish this brochure as an article series? The ambivalent stance of *Göteborgs Dagblad*, the dismantling of the guild-system in 1846 and the recent upheavals in Stockholm in 1848 all point to the fact that at least some of the antisemitic attacks were based on a resistance against radical societal changes which the dismantling of the estate society entailed. Also, lowered import duties and other financial reforms might have played a part in the antisemitic sentiments, since Jews were often accused of importing luxury goods, which was seen as lowering wages for Swedish workers. It is not unlikely that Backman was critical of radical



1711 edition of Johann Andreas Eisenmenger’s *Entdecktes Judenthum*. The Jewish Museum of Switzerland.

changes and sympathised with the vulnerable position of craftsmen. This would give him a motive for publishing the article series as well as the antisemitic letters in 'Anonyma Lådan'.

What to do? Deliberations between Judiska Intresset's two branches

When word about these antisemitic attacks reached the members of Judiska Intresset in Stockholm, they were confounded to learn their brethren in Gothenburg were keeping a low profile. They suggested – since such vile accusations could not be left unanswered – either publishing a response or visiting the editor of the newspaper to hinder further publications; they stated that the only excuse for silence was 'higher motives or wise calculation' (JFS A1a:8).⁹ However, the members in Stockholm thought retaliation to be the best course of action.

Ludvig Hartvig, a member of the Gothenburg branch, answered the Stockholm branch in a separate letter addressed to Axel Lamm and explained that 'the matter is of greater importance' than the Stockholm members 'maybe are able to imagine', since they were 'unfamiliar with the position and the circumstances here' (JFS A1a:8).¹⁰ Moreover, visiting Backman was out of the question since no respectable person would have anything to do with him, owing in large part to his ill-reputed actions that, according to Hartvig, bordered on criminal activity.

However, members of Judiska Intresset in Gothenburg had plans. They published an

appeal in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* (see below) and would try to convince the Patriotiska sällskapet (Patriotic Society) to give a reward to another Christian maid, who had been in the service of Hartvig's father for more than twenty-three years. If this was successful, a ceremony would be held in one of the city's churches. Thereafter, if the priest gave an advantageous speech, they would publish this speech in a local newspaper. They hoped this would abate the worst anti-Jewish sentiments among 'the less fortunate of the craftsmen class' in Gothenburg, whom, according to Hartvig, were the main readers of *Göteborgs Dagblad*. Unfortunately, they did not know how to proceed with their plan (JFS A1a:8).¹¹ Probably, the plan failed, since this was not mentioned again in any of Judiska Intresset's protocols, nor were any mentions of a maid in a Jewish family receiving such a medal published in newspapers in Gothenburg throughout 1849.¹²

Since members of Judiska Intresset in Gothenburg did not believe confrontation to be the best course of action, they had a letter published in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, in which they stated their intent to not get involved in the debate, and publicly appealed to other Jews to follow their example. They asserted their belief that no 'thinking individual' could believe such prejudices, and that the social position of Jews in society was the best safeguard against such accusations. Appealing to the enlightenment and intelligence of the readers, they wrote:

9 Protocol 171. 21.1.1849. Stockholm.

10 Letter from Ludvig Hartvig to Axel Lamm. Gothenburg 26.1.1849. Attachment to Protocol 173. 12.2.1849. Stockholm.

11 Letter from Ludvig Hartvig to Axel Lamm. Gothenburg 26.1.1849. Attachment to Protocol 173. 12.2.1849. Stockholm.

12 There are, however, several mentions of other people receiving such medals.

We would consider ourselves to lack respect for our *Christian brothers*, if we assumed that attacks of such content and nature as those which the aforementioned articles contain would exert any influence upon them; especially at a time when the holy principle of religious freedom with every day gain ever more recognition among Europe's most enlightened nations, with humanism and tolerance belonging to the holiest demands of our time! (GHT 17.1.1849: 3)

Rhetorically, the letter is interesting. Even though it was addressed to Jews in Gothenburg, it is meant for the Christian majority, and by appealing to the tolerance and enlightenment of Christians, they appealed to the reader's rationality. Furthermore, by signing the letter 'Gothenburger of the Mosaic faith' (Götheborgare af Mosaiska trosbekännelsen), they appealed to a sense of community in the city, bridging religious difference. The members in Stockholm praised the Gothenburg branch for the steps taken (JFS A1a:8).¹³

One can conclude that members of Judiska Intresset in Gothenburg were afraid of antisemitism among craftsmen. After what had happened in Stockholm in 1848, it is not surprising that such a fear was present amongst the members of Judiska Intresset in Gothenburg. Indeed, even though there had not been any proper pogroms in Sweden, up until 1849 at least two riots had anti-Jewish aspects – in 1838 and 1848 – and several police notices in newspapers, mainly in Stockholm, show how young men assaulted Jews and, in some cases, rubbed pork in their faces – which is corroborated by later testimonies (Carlsson 2021: 86). Anti-Jewish sentiments were not just sentiments; they also took the form of antisemitic acts.

13 Protocol 173. 12.2.1849. Stockholm.

Responses from the congregation

The first response from a member of the congregation – excluding Judiska Intresset's members' letter in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* – came in the form of an article published in the same publication, written by the 'pastor of the Mosaic congregation' (rabbi) Dr Carl Heinemann, defending Judaism as a religion. Heinemann denounced personal attacks in the press as beneath him but declared himself incapable of silence when the whole Jewish tradition came under attack. Heinemann's article echoes some points made by the anti-antisemitic writers in 'Anonyma Lådan'; he maintained that a congregation cannot be held responsible for actions or statements of individual members. He also discredited the source of the quotations, labelling the 1822 brochure a 'false authority', and stressed that the brochure's unavailability to the public, who therefore could not judge by themselves, further discredited the use of the quotations. One of his main arguments was that they were taken out of context, especially their historical contexts. 'As priest and religious teacher', he assured readers that the teachings presented in the quotations were incompatible with 'the religious and moral teachings ... in the synagogue and in the school' and encouraged people to visit the Jewish school and to read the textbook *Lärobok i Israelitiska Religionen* (1844) by Dr Abraham Alexander Wolff, who, at the time, was chief rabbi in Copenhagen. After these encouragements, Heinemann declared the whole dispute settled (GHT 7.2.1849: 2–3).

But was Heinemann's response enough? Should more be done to stem the tide of antisemitic accusations? Such questions occupied several meetings of the directors of the congregations. Would the best course of action be to sue the newspaper, or would it be better to lie low? According to Hartvig's letter, the



Lazarus Elias Magnus (1770-1851), chairman of the Jewish congregation in Gothenburg, painting from 1850 by Geskel Saloman (1821-1902). Gothenburg City Museum.

directors, Lazarus Elias Magnus and Heyman Jacob Heyman, and the rabbi, Dr Heinemann, visited the minister Fåhrens to explain to him how easily the articles in *Göteborgs Dagblad* could lead to violence against Jews – warning him that many uprisings in other countries often started with ‘persecutions against the Jews’. Therefore, the minister should prevent Backman from publishing further antisemitic material (JFS A1a:8).¹⁴ Whether or not this meeting took place is uncertain. The protocols of the directors do not mention such a meeting and I have not found any documents in the archives of local and regional authorities to confirm it. However, it was not an uncommon strategy. For example, Judiska

14 Letter from Ludvig Hartvig to Axel Lamm. Gothenburg 26.1.1849. Attachment to Protocol 173. 12.2.1849. Stockholm.

Intresset, just like any other advocacy group, visited politicians and publishers to gain their support for the Jewish cause or to stop the publishing of antisemitic articles (Carlesson Magalhães 2020).

On 10 February 1849, the directors had a meeting, in which a letter from a member of the congregation, M. E. Philip, and his suggestion to sue *Göteborgs Dagblad* for the articles and to ‘seek restoration from the chief editor’, was considered (JFG A3a:2).¹⁵ The directors all agreed no such charges should be brought, but, since Philip had failed to attach the said issues of *Göteborgs Dagblad*, they would make further inquiries and, for themselves, delve deeper into what was actually said in the smear campaign (JFG A3a:2).¹⁶

Instead of summoning the voting members of the congregation for an extra meeting, the directors decided to wait to present the issue at the ordinary general meeting on 6 April (JFG A3a:2).¹⁷ In a statement from the directors, Magnus and Heyman, to the voting members of the congregation, the directors pondered what reasons there could be behind the publishing of such articles:

no other reason ... than the pleasure of the publisher, in as confined a space as possible, to give all the publicity he can to almost all the most spiteful and – if it were true – the most degrading sorts of raw fanaticism, envy, ignorance, spirit of persecution and malice that ever was conjured during the darkness of the Middle Ages and the pyre-lit golden age of the Inquisition. Only the murder accusations are missing... (JFG A1a:1)¹⁸

15 Copy of letter from M. E. Philip to the directors 10.2.1849: 202–3.

16 10.2.1849: 202–3.

17 27.3.1849: 203–4.

18 Statement from the directors 6.4.1849: 206–7. This is clearly referring to Blood Libel accusations, see, for example (Rainer

The directors suggested that nothing else than contempt was to be felt against these attacks but, since the attacks against Judaism had already been met by Heinemann, to retaliate further would be counterproductive. The congregation unanimously decided not to press any charges against *Göteborgs Dagblad* and its editor (JFG A1a:1).¹⁹ It was not respectable to retaliate against such accusations, and respectability was very important in the nineteenth century, especially among the bourgeoisie (Mosse 1985), which the directors and the voting members of congregation belonged to.

What can be seen in the discussions in the congregation – and which is especially clear in the displayed citation above – is a view on history emerging during the era of emancipation: a narrative constructing the Middle Ages as a dark and unenlightened era filled to the brink with anti-Jewish sentiments and pogroms, with the ghetto as the epitome of oppression, in contrast to the enlightened and (more) philosemitic times they themselves lived in – or at least, hoped would arrive soon (cf. Baron 1964; Schwartz 2021). Such a narrative is present throughout the period and was sometimes expressed in discussions within the congregations.

Concluding remarks: no smoke without fire

What have we learned from this case study? It corroborates previous research, which suggests antisemitic attitudes were widespread (Heß 2021), and that societal changes are fertile grounds for expressions of antisemitism (Bauman 1998; Edgren 2016). Classical antisemitic ideas were circulated in Gothenburg but there were also Christians ready to

1995). As mentioned above, *Göteborgs Dagblad*, republished a Blood Libel accusations in 1838.

19 6.4.1849: 208.

take an anti-antisemitic stance and defend the city's Jewish community. One empirical fact is quite clear: antisemitism in Gothenburg was perceived as a real threat, and members of the Jewish community feared that the attacks made in *Göteborgs Dagblad* could end up leading to anti-Jewish violence. This is an often-overlooked aspect of Jewish life in Gothenburg.

The main arguments and accusations against Jews were based on classical antisemitic ideas: abominable religious beliefs, animosity towards Christians and Christianity, dishonesty, greed, hypocrisy, persecution of converts, ridiculous traditions, and that Jews were the *de facto* rulers of Gothenburg. This is not a shocking revelation, which it is not meant to be. What it shows, however, is that 'even' in liberal Gothenburg (cf. Leiska 2016), antisemitism flourished and not only among the upper class and the intelligentsia but also among craftsmen. Just as Lars M. Andersson has pointed out, the fact that such antisemitic material could be published reveals latent antisemitism ready to be employed to criticise modernity (Andersson 2000: 174).

But why did this debate occur? The actual event with the matron and the maid can easily be seen as just an excuse to attack Jews and Judaism. The motivation behind the anti-antisemitic responses to the debate is quite clear: they, the writers, were declaring their liberal and, more importantly, Christian identities. Considering themselves *true* Christians, they declared that true Christians never criticise Jews or Judaism. It is more difficult to elucidate the motivation behind the antisemitic attacks: one important factor, as I stated earlier, was the telling article published in the last issue of *Göteborgs Dagblad*, which warned against radical societal changes and against blindly following the *Zeitgeist*. Here, we see the conservative standpoint at a time when the estate society was collapsing. This only explains the

motivation of Charles Backman, the editor, to publish the antisemitic letters and the article series about Judaism. But what was his motivation for publishing the anti-antisemitic responses? Did he want to lessen the risk of accusations of being a Jew-hater by publishing the other side of the debate? Perhaps. Did he want to present himself as a champion of free speech? Possibly. This last explanation is also the most likely since respectability and liberal-bourgeois ideals were of great importance at the time.

If we look at the audience of the newspaper, which, according to *Judiska Intresset*, was mostly craftsmen – people who were greatly affected by the changing societal structures – we may reveal another possible motivation. Possibly, the antisemitic writers belonged to this stratum of society, which saw their lives change and had for a long time seen Jews as competition (Valentin 1924; cf. Zimmermann 1979). The situation for craftsmen had changed and society was changing all the more rapidly with the dismantling of the guild-system in 1846 and other financial reforms. Just as Jan Christensen points out regarding other antisemitic outbursts in the Gothenburg press (Christensen 2020: 156), these societal changes, alongside changes in consumption, were the main causes behind this animosity towards Jews which surfaced for two months in ‘Anonyma Lådan’.

But why did it end? One possibility is that this debate and the article series did not receive the desired attention, since the newspaper failed and ceased publication in February 1849. Censorship of the press (*indragningsmakten*) had been abolished in 1844, so it was probably not censored out of existence. It could, however, have failed to cause the stir it aimed for and thereby sell more issues. When this did not happen, the publisher may have decided to cancel production.

Now, how did members of the Jewish congregation respond and why? Few wanted to retaliate. Since respectability was of great importance (Mosse 1985), the majority favoured a subtler, and more respectable way of dealing with the antisemitic attacks: to not respond. The idea behind this course of action was that if Jews did respond *en masse*, it would amount to throwing fuel on the fire, and thus strengthen the case made by the antisemitic side of the debate. This stance, that combating antisemitic sentiments was best conducted by ignoring it was a widely accepted strategy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many thought it best to leave such dealings to Christians, since it was considered to be more effective if Christians combated Christian antisemitism and not Jews (cf. Suchy 1983). *Judiska Intresset* attempted soft influence, which seems to have failed. However, fear of antisemitism among craftsmen and in society at large is obvious in the material from *Judiska Intresset*. They were well aware of the events in Stockholm the previous year, and in 1838, and most likely feared similar events taking place in Gothenburg. So, even though Jews seem to have been to a degree integrated in the city, fear of antisemitism and antisemitic riots was real and present among them in the late 1840s. ■

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Antisemitism and anti-antisemitism are such aspects which need to be considered to fully comprehend what the struggle(s) for Jewish emancipation entailed for Swedish Jews.



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GHT: *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*

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AI:57: 1849.

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