Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes and in the bibliography:

AIF Archives israélites de France
ASEJ Annuaire de la société des études juives
HJ Historia Judaica
HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual
JQR Jewish Quarterly Review
JSS Jewish Social Studies
MGWJ Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums
PAJHS Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society
PAAJR Publication of the American Academy for Jewish Research
REJ Revue des études juives
RHB Revue historique de Bordeaux
SBB Studies in Bibliography and Booklore

Introduction

On January 28, 1790, the makers of the French Revolution decreed that all those who were “known in France by the name of Portuguese, Spanish, and Avignonais Jews” should henceforth enjoy “the rights” of active citizens. Between three and four thousand individuals were thus given equality. Most of these people resided in the southwestern corner of the country, primarily in the cities of Bordeaux and Bayonne. The great majority were Sephardim, that is, Jews who remembered proudly that their forebears had once lived in the Iberian Peninsula.

Twenty months later, on September 27, 1791, after much debate and many delays, all the rest of the Jews of France were emancipated. This second decree applied to some thirty thousand individuals, who with few exceptions lived on the northeastern border, in Alsace, in the city of Metz and the villages nearby, and in the duchy of Lorraine. These Jews were Ashkenazim: they were among the heirs of those religious and cultural forms that had been fashioned by the Diaspora in central Europe. At the beginning of the Revolution there were some individuals of great wealth among them, and even a small handful of semi-Westernized intellectuals. On the whole, however, this community was much poorer than the Sephardim; it was culturally more foreign and it was much more hated by its gentle neighbors. Nonetheless, by the middle of September, 1791, the parliament that had made the Revolution could no longer avoid granting equality to the Ashkenazim too.

1 Halphen, Recueil des lois, pp. 1–2, 9–10.
2 Anchel, Napoléon et les Juifs, pp. 1–2.
Earlier that month the first French constitution had been adopted. The famous declaration of the “rights of man and of the citizen,” which had been proclaimed during the exalted days of the summer of 1789, was now affirmed as the basic law of the realm. The continued exclusion of the Jews of eastern France from full participation in the country’s political, economic, and social life had become untenable, for this charter of liberty contained the proviso that “no one may be disturbed in his opinions, and especially not in his religion, provided that their outward expressions do not trouble public order as established by law.” Nonetheless, various objections continued to be voiced at the crucial session of Tuesday, September 27, 1791. Duport, a liberal former deputy of the nobility of Paris, reminded the Assemblée that to hold such anti-Jewish views was equivalent to doing battle against the constitution itself. The motion to emancipate the Jews then passed. For the first time in the modern history of the West all the Jews within the borders of a European state were united with all of its other citizens as equals before the law.

With these events of 1790 and 1791 in France a new era in Jewish history began. The armies of the Revolution took “liberty, equality, and fraternity” with them beyond the borders of France. Under the dictatorship and empire of Napoleon, Jews continued to be given equality as a matter of course wherever his power extended. The restoration of the Bourbons to the throne of France left the emancipation of the Jews in France itself untouched. In Italy and Germany, where the laws imposed by the French were indeed reversed after the collapse of Bonaparte, at least the memory of equality remained. All over Europe, even during the period of political reaction between 1815 and 1848, Jewish opinion was dominated by two convictions: what had happened in France was now immediately possible elsewhere in Europe; it had to happen in every country because it was an inevitable corollary of the emerging liberal-secular political order to which the future belonged.

These hopes seemed to be on the road to realization in the middle years of the nineteenth century. In the various states of central Europe the Jews achieved legal emancipation after 1848.

On paper, this principle was extended as far as the Balkans in 1878, when the Congress of Berlin made a guarantee of equality for Jews a pre-condition for giving Rumania its independence. None of these achievements came easily for there was considerable opposition everywhere, even in the midst of a supposedly progressive century. The largest Jewish community in Europe, that of the Russian empire, continued to suffer increasing persecution. Nonetheless, even there the leaders of “enlightened” Jewish opinion believed that further acculturation by Jews and the inevitable growth of liberalism in the gentle majority would bring freedom.

During the nineteenth century the major Jewish efforts for complete integration into European society were led by middle-class elements. A minority group existed (and it became ever more prominent towards the end of the century) which doubted that equality could be achieved within the bourgeois and capitalist order. Jewish socialists of all varieties, however, were even more certain than the Jewish liberals that total emancipation was inevitable as part of the coming social revolution. None believed that the European left could ever develop any serious tendency towards anti-Semitism.

Both bourgeois and socialist Jews were, of course, aware that opposition to the Emancipation was not vanishing. They had to find ways of understanding this phenomenon, that is, of explaining why anti-Semitism was continuing into a supposedly progressive era. Their favorite explanation was “time lag”: clericalist, counter-revolutionary, and Christian medievalist elements had persisted into the new age, but they would inevitably die away. Jews could understand their enmity, for anti-Semitism was conceived as the last gasp of those who had either not yet entered the modern age or who had refused to enter it. Jews expected, however, that the secularized, educated, politically liberal or left-wing elements, the heirs of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, would be their friends.

Not all of them were. On the contrary, some of the most advanced circles in Europe of the nineteenth century were quite impatient with Jews and even hated them. In their discomfort Jewish liberals and socialists devised several explanations. Some of the
criticism was accepted as reasonable. As a matter of fact, many Jews were refusing to acculturate themselves completely. Jewish liberals agreed with their gentile peers that cultural foreignness and religious apartness were blocking the way to a glorious future both for the Jews and for the whole of society. Among the socialists the great outcry was that the Jews, in their traditional economic pursuits as middlemen, were "unproductive." Here, too, Jewish socialists joined with their gentile peers in finding merit in the criticism: Jews should, indeed, reorganize their economy so as to make, supposedly, a more worthwhile contribution to production. Jewish liberals and socialists could thus agree with the milder critics of their people. Nonetheless, they could not avoid recognizing that some of the politically most advanced gentiles had, at very least, a particular nastiness in their tone when they talked of Jews. Here again the concept of time lag was invoked. It was argued that even great men such as Voltaire and Proudhon could not completely free themselves of their earliest Christian upbringings. Their angers were explained, however, as unfortunate personal idiosyncrasies, which had no bearing on the essential content or thrust of the progressive ideas they had helped to fashion.

A great turning came in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In the very midst of a wave of pogroms in Russia in 1881 a young Jewish "enlightener," Moshe Leib Lilienblum, sat cowering in hiding in Odessa. He wrote in his diary that he had, of course, known that there had been pogroms before, yet this pogrom transformed him from a believer in assimilation to a passionate Zionist. What made the crucial difference was the sight of young high school and university students, the best educated and most politically advanced groups in Russia, among the makers of the pogroms. This theme was crucial to the pamphlet written by another "enlightened" Jew from Odessa, Leo Pinsker. He, too, turned Zionist and preached the doctrine of Jewish Auto-Emancipation (the title of his essay), a Zionist solution to the Jewish problem.

For a number of decades only the Zionists cast any serious doubt on the meaning of the historic events in France in 1790 and 1791. They agreed with the believers in the Emancipation that modern anti-Semitism was nourished emotionally and historically by the older passions of Christian theology and medieval Jew-hatred. What was new in the Zionist outlook was that Pinsker and Theodor Herzl, the central figure of modern Zionism, both independently recognized that modern anti-Semitism was more than just the result of a time lag; its contemporary version was held to be a new, secular, and continuing phenomenon. It was endemic among large elements of the most modern groups within European society, not because such people had as yet failed to free themselves of the remains of medievalism, but because they had a new, contemporary reason for being the enemies of the Jews. It was the hatred that any people have for aliens in their midst.8

The Zionist explanation of anti-Semitism was radical. Unlike the liberal and socialist theories it did not downgrade the importance of contemporary Jew-hatred. Nonetheless, this theory too made anti-Semitism "normal" and to some degree even rationalized it. Pinsker and Herzl were both liberal nationalists. They shared in the reigning hopes of their day for a world order that would be a concert of national cultures, expressing themselves through sovereign states. Such cultures had a right to prefer complete internal unity, and anti-Semitism could thus be understood as the undertow of the wave of the future. The same thing that the Jews could do would be to normalize their existence by reconstituting themselves as a nation. They would thus enter the larger society of mankind in the only way in which this was possible.

Even in his darkest moments Herzl believed that the emancipation of the Jews of Europe was irreversible. He never doubted that the events which had begun in Paris in 1790 and 1791 represented a radical break with the European past. The Zionists, too, were convinced that a commitment had been made at that historic moment by the bearers of modern European culture and the leaders of its social advance to find some mode of including the Jews within the polity of Europe.

The era of Western history that began with the French Revolution ended in Auschwitz. The emancipation of the Jews was re-

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8 Ibid., pp. 45-51, where there is more extended comment on this point, and pp. 269, 218-20, for Herzl's own remarks in the text of The Jewish State.
versed in the most horrendous way. For a short while after 1945 the reigning explanation of the Nazi phenomenon was psychological: this demonic anti-Semitism had arisen from the depths of the most emotionally disturbed element in Europe. This first attempt at explanation has now been overwhelmed by the evidence that has been mounted against it. Adolf Hitler was undoubtedly mad, but the millions who responded to his hatred of Jews cannot be called insane in any conventional sense of individual psychosis. For that matter, the notion that a mass madness in Europe in the twentieth century expressed itself at its most murderous by choosing to attack the Jews requires explanation in itself. What created such a predisposition? Why was the emancipation of the Jews that part of the liberal order which was destroyed most easily and effectively?

Hannah Arendt confronted these questions in the years immediately after World War II from the perspective of an historian. Her explanation had the signal merit of applying systematically, with a richness of understanding all her own, the Zionist insight that modern anti-Semitism was a contemporary, secular phenomenon and not a revival of medieval Christian Jew-hatred. Various aspects of Arendt's complicated and subtle analysis must, however, be qualified or even largely rejected. For example, she has exaggerated the role of the court Jews in the formation of the European nation states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The fashioning of the French state was the paradigm of that entire historic process. Jews played no role of any consequence there; during the last century of the "old order" the French monarchy was largely financed by foreign Protestant bankers.

A more fundamental issue is raised by the factor she has identified as being primary in the creation of modern anti-Semitism. In the nineteenth century the European nation states, as their economies were becoming national, were ever less disposed to allow the Jews any significant enclave that they could keep as their own. In Arendt's view modern anti-Semites attacked the Jews because their wealth was no longer related to the kind of real power that the court

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6 This thesis underlay the massive five volumes, Studies in Prejudice, ed. Hockheimer and Flowerman, which were begun towards the end of World War II and appeared in 1959.

7 Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism; see especially pp. 3-33.

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Jews had once held. Ideological anti-Semitism had thus crystallized in the last third of the nineteenth century to announce that society could and should now dispense with the Jews. But is it conceivable that the enormous power of this hate was bred in a few short decades? Did the new anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century really arise, essentially, out of the contemporary historic situation?

One of the announced purposes of the Emancipation had been to normalize the economy of the Jew so that no particular pursuit, not even moneylending, should be the Jew's own preserve. As this normalization was happening, what predisposed their enemies both to exaggerate, wildly, the economic power of the Jews as it was in fact declining, and concurrently to adjudge the Jews to be even physically redundant because their power had indeed declined? As moralist, Hannah Arendt was eager to avoid the notion of an eternal anti-Semitism because the image of an overwhelming historical force can be used all too easily by individuals and by whole generations to disclaim moral responsibility. Nevertheless, Arendt's assertion that modern anti-Semitism is entirely new is not true to the facts. Medieval impulses towards hatred of Jews remained much more powerful in the new age of post-Christian ideology than she has suggested. More fundamentally, the secularity that she has identified as the new note in modern anti-Semitism did not arise for the first time in the nineteenth century. This Jew-hatred had old antecedents, even older ones than the Christian anti-Semitism it both used and replaced; its power came from the fact that it was a revival of one of the oldest European traditions.

Modern, secular anti-Semitism was fashioned not as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the Revolution, but within the Enlightenment and Revolution themselves. Some of the greatest of the founders of the liberal era modernized and secularized anti-Semitism too. In this new form they gave it fresh and powerful roots by connecting this version of Jew-hatred with ancient pagan traditions. The action of the French Revolution in emancipating the Jews was thus no simple triumph of liberalism over darkness. The immediate context of this declaration and the sources out of which it arose were complicated and not of one piece.

The processes that were at work in France itself were also acting
in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries elsewhere in central and western Europe, but a new understanding of the situation in France is, nonetheless, of crucial importance. The French Jewish community in the eighteenth century was a kind of microcosm of all the others. It contained representative elements of both the major Euro-Jewish traditions, the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi; the political and economic history of these Jews was typical of what was happening at that time elsewhere in western and central Europe. More important, in the eighteenth century, the "century of Voltaire," France dominated the spiritual life of the West. The forces in French thought and politics that created the Revolution were the impulses for most of the important developments in all of Europe in the next century. It is in the land in which the emancipation of the Jews began that we must search for some clues with which to explain not only its successes but also its failure. What appears from this new study is that the events of 1790 and 1791 were surrounded, on every level, with ambiguities and ambivalences.

Among the Jews themselves the communal leadership fought almost to the very end to maintain and even to strengthen the internal autonomous structure of the Jewish community and their control of it. The "price" for equality, the ending of all formal separatism on the part of the Jews, was not paid easily and as a matter of course. The leaders of Jewry were thus in considerable conflict with their best friends among the gentiles, who believed almost unanimously that the complete regeneration of the mass of Jews required the end of their autonomy and their complete assimilation into French society.

More important ambivalences appeared in French opinion itself. Those who voted for the decrees were, indeed, the heirs of newer ideas about tolerance, but they represented very different ideas as well. Each of these several "schools" was, in its turn, divided about the Jewish question.

Even the Church was divided, though here the pro-Jewish elements were very small indeed. The older Christian hatred of the Jews continued to dominate both the clergy and the faithful in France throughout the eighteenth century and into the next. None-
Revolution, a deputy from Alsace named Jean François Rewbell, fought bitterly against the emancipation of the Jews; he derived many of his arguments from the physiocrats.

The most crucial and fateful ambivalence about Jews was present among the philosophes, the leaders of new thought in the eighteenth century. It has been well known, from his own time to this day, that Voltaire personally disliked Jews quite intensely, and this has generally been explained as an accidental and secondary phenomenon. Voltaire was supposed to have been reflecting both some personal unfortunate experiences with Jews and his incapacity as an individual to free himself from his earliest Christian education. The attacks that he and some of his leading associates mounted on Jews and Judaism were supposedly part of the process by which he was attempting to dethrone Christianity, and they were not meant to lessen the ultimate claims of Jews upon equal regard in the new world that enlightened men were envisaging. A rereading of all the evidence, however, proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that in the discussions of the several decades before the Revolution Voltaire was consistently understood on all sides to be the enemy of the Jews of the present as well as of those of the past. His writings were the great arsenal of anti-Jewish arguments for those enemies of the Jews who wanted to sound contemporary. The "enlightened" friends of the Jews invariably quoted from Montesquieu and did battle with Voltaire.

Voltaire's own views cannot be explained, or rather explained away, in such fashion as to defend a view of the Enlightenment as ultimately completely tolerant. An analysis of everything that Voltaire wrote about Jews throughout his life establishes the proposition that he is the major link in Western intellectual history between the anti-Semitism of classic paganism and the modern age. In his favorite pose of Cicero reborn he ruled the Jew to be outside society and to be hopelessly alien even to the future age of enlightened men.

These ambivalences within the Enlightenment have had large consequences. Jacobin anti-Semites used Voltaire's rhetoric and that of the physiocrats. In the early decades of the nineteenth century some of the greatest figures of European socialism, men like Proud-