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Jeffrey Haus, *Challenges of Equality: Judaism, State, and Education in Nineteenth-century France*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009. 256 pp. \$49.95 (hb). ISBN 978-0-8143-3380-8.

Review by Sharif Gemie, University of Glamorgan.

This is a well-researched, clearly written work that opens up a new angle on both Jewish history and the history of education. Beginning with a consideration of the wider debates concerning models of assimilation, integration, regeneration and identity, Jeffrey Haus's book moves on to consider how these debates structured the development of Jewish schooling in nineteenth-century France.

*Challenges of Equality* starts by outlining the nature of the Jewish presence in France: in the late eighteenth century there were important Jewish communities in Alsace-Lorraine, in Paris and in Bordeaux, which was the site of an old Sephardic exile community. Between 1806-08, Napoleon directed the creation of the Consistory, which would structure and control Jewish institutions, and act as an interlocutor in debates with governments. Nineteenth-century legislation tended to treat these various groups as a single bloc, whereas in reality there were important divisions within French Jews: some resulting from their geographic location, some from different attitudes towards the French state and French political culture.

For much of the nineteenth century, Jewish leaders were in the potentially paradoxical position of advancing arguments that stated that the cause of integration would be best served by the creation of a separate schooling system for Jewish children. In particular, Consistorial leaders stressed the urgent need for primary schooling for Jewish children, while successive early nineteenth-century governments were more concerned with secondary schooling. Progress was slow: by 1831, the Consistory only controlled 21 Jewish schools (p.32). Governments provided inadequate funding, and therefore appeals were made to local Jewish communities to subsidize the schools: they were often reluctant to do so, sometimes due to traditionalism (Consistorial schools seemed too secular, too integrationist), sometimes due to a simple scepticism. With the exception of a few towns such as Mulhouse (p.59), Jewish schools were rarely rooted in local communities.

The Consistory was somewhat more successful in the creation of the Ecole Central Rabbinique de France, which opened in Metz in April 1829, with substantial financial backing from the government. This institution pioneered a new model of rabbi: not simply French-speaking, but fully conversant with the realities of French culture. Haus makes an interesting observation here: "The rabbi who learnt Latin and Greek became decidedly "modern", while any other French citizen who did so remained decidedly "traditional" (p.83). During the late 1840s and early 1850s there was a protracted debate on the best location for the Ecole, with some arguing that Metz was a stronghold of Jewish tradition and therefore the best site, while others saw Paris, as the centre of French culture and modernist values, as more suitable. The Ecole was finally transferred to Paris in 1856, and renamed the Séminaire Israélite in 1859 (p.110).

Haus notes the importance of the arrival of new Jewish migrants from East Europe in the 1880s, but discusses these in less detail. Post-Ferry, as the Republic turned to anti-clericalism, the structures and

institutions created by the Consistory had to be re-thought. Rather than aiming to create concrete, physical buildings to embody the links between Judaism and the state, Consistorial leaders came to accept more abstract concepts as symbolizing their sympathy for French political culture.

There are some flaws with Haus's approach. It is a little too reliant on the Grew-Harrigan school of number-crunching as a mode of interpretation and occasionally rather naive in its acceptance of institutional records – on p.86 exam results are presented as if they were a transparent and unquestionable record of a school's activity. Certainly, Haus could have considered in more detail some questions of power and experience: very little is said about the day-to-day functioning of schools, and almost nothing on whether girls and women benefitted in any manner from the Consistory's initiatives. But, overall, this is clearly a successful work. Haus is to be congratulated for considering issues which previous scholars have ignored, and for producing a readable, coherent and convincing analysis.

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