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**Esther Benbassa**, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. xii + 281 pp. Chronology, notes, bibliography and index. \$29.95 (cl). ISBN 0-691-05984-5.

**Michael Burns**, *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Documentary History*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1999. xiv + 210 pp. Appendix, footnotes, bibliography and index. \$39.95 (cl). ISBN 0-312-21813-3.

**Vicki Caron**, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. xi + 605 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$65.00 (cl). ISBN 0-8047-3312-0.

Review by Donna F. Ryan, Gallaudet University.

Western liberal democracies have often been judged according to the quality of their treatment of minority groups. Widely dispersed legal and political rights, religious toleration, and access to economic opportunities have been hallmarks of enlightened nations. The story of the relationship between France and the Jews living within its occasionally shifting borders is complex, sometimes heartening, but often distressing. In fact, the telling term "Jewish Question" was discussed recently on H-France in connection with Jonathan Judaken's review of Pierre Birnbaum's *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State and Community in Modern France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) for H-Antisemitism. Three recent books reviewed here make valuable new contributions to the field of French Jewish history, and all are appropriate for the classroom. Benbassa and Burns are suitable for undergraduates and introductory courses, while Caron is essential for graduate students interested in French public opinion and public policy regarding refugees from Hitler's persecution.

The translation into English of Esther Benbassa's *The Jews of France* fills a longstanding need for a succinct, general, synthetic history of French Jewry that incorporates much of the recent research into a readable introductory text. Beginning in the fourth century, Jews in the Diaspora entered Roman Gaul where they assimilated well. Benbassa depicts the Frankish period as hospitable, for only later under a weakened monarchy did regional conflicts break out with Jews. Benbassa aptly describes the vicissitudes of Jewish experiences in France in the medieval period and the rich intellectual and cultural life of the era shine in her account.

Benbassa demonstrates how the lives of Jews in the South, in the East, and in Paris had diverged by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Those in the South, cut off from rabbis and religious discourse, practiced a more personal religious observance that made them open to Enlightenment thinking more than their coreligionists from Alsace and Lorraine, a rift that may be reflected in the fact that the Revolutionary government emancipated Sephardim from the South before Ashkenazim from the East.

As Benbassa tells the familiar story of the creation of the Consistory and the gradual, if superficial, integration of Jews into French society in the nineteenth century, she emphasizes regional variations, showing how poorly assimilated were Jews from Bordeaux. During the same period a diverse Jewish population would explode in Paris as the city drew immigrants for economic, political and intellectual reasons. Benbassa's account is especially nuanced as she details Jewish neighborhoods, marriage patterns, and economic and intellectual endeavors.

From the late nineteenth century on, waves of Jewish immigration, predominately by Jews whose identity did not easily blend into the dominant cultural model that demanded total assimilation, would render Jews more and more "the others" in French society. Sometimes considered radically leftist and politically dangerous, other times seen as capitalist and industrialist oppressors of the workers, or urban destroyers of rural French communal life, Jews in France would alternate between great social, artistic, intellectual and economic success and abject rejection and expulsion from the body politic. French schizophrenia about the Jews is evident in the Dreyfus Affair, Vichy antisemitic laws, French collaboration in the Holocaust, and the courageous acts of those who risked their own well being during World War II to help French and foreign Jews alike. Benbassa ends her book by looking at the arrival in the metropole of North African Jews following Algerian independence. She examines the challenges faced by these Jews, on the one hand rejected in North Africa as tools of French imperialism and, on the other, abandoned by both Vichy and De Gaulle.

Esther Benbassa has woven the many threads of recent historical scholarship on the Jews in France into a tapestry of intense color and plush texture. Historians of Judaism and of France will find neither a better nor more up-to-date introductory synthesis available in English. Likewise, Michael Burns, in *France and the Dreyfus Affair*, gives us a fresh and compelling study of the turn of the century affair in a concise and readable book. Written for the Bedford Series in History and Culture, it is a fine compilation of well-chosen documents and lucid analysis.

Burns deftly introduces the familiar cast of characters in both the text and a practical appendix. The heroes of the piece are drawn from live models rather than clay idols, as we read correspondence between Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus against the backdrop of eyewitness descriptions of the unassuming Captain's courtroom demeanor and weak-voiced responses. We meet Mathieu Dreyfus, whose loyalty to his brother and family would lead him to consult a clairvoyant and circulate false rumors of his brother's escape from Devil's Island. In his desire to keep his cause célèbre in the news, Mathieu neglected to consider the punishments that would befall Alfred in his prison cell because of his lie. Emile Zola, novelist and author of the letter "J'Accuse," emerges as a controversial figure, hated by right-wing xenophobes as an Italian peddler of pornography. The villains of the story--Armand Mercier du Paty de Clam, who interrogated Dreyfus and falsified documents to convict him, and Hubert-Joseph Henry, his co-conspirator--are flesh and blood in this study. Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, the actual traitor, emerges from the pages as an erratic, debt-ridden ne'er-do-well. Even Georges Picquart, discoverer of Esterhazy's treason and perhaps the most outspoken Dreyfusard in the army, is sculpted in deep relief as a man whose integrity outweighed his bigotry as an avowed Alsatian anti-Semite.

Beyond making this frequently told tale come to life once again (I literally could not put the book down), Burns has given it historical and cultural context. Whether he is quoting the anti-Semitic *La Libre Parole*, demonstrating why feminists like Marguerite Durand and the journalist Séverine were Dreyfusards, while the Comtesse de Martel de Janville spewed venomous anti-Semitism under the nom

de plume Gyp, or describing a peculiar meeting between Esterhazy and Oscar Wilde in London, Burns demonstrates mastery of the big picture as well as the intriguing detail. His choice of documents and excerpts is excellent. For example, when anti-Dreyfusards sent donations to erect a monument to honor Commandant Henry after his suicide, the lists of donors filled more than seven hundred pages and included the following patrons:

“A veteran of 1870, who considers the Jews the ten plagues of Egypt reunited. 2 fr....

“A rural priest, who offers up the most ardent prayers for the extermination of the two enemies of France: the Jews and the Freemason, 5 fr....

"A teacher from the Jura, who does not fail to tell his students that Jews and their friends are the vampires of France. 1 fr....

“A future medical student, already sharpening his scalpel to dissect the Macabee Dreyfus, bored through by the dozen bullets of a firing squad. 0.25 fr....

“A widow, who raises her son for God and France and in hatred of Freemasons and Jews. 0.15 fr.” (pp. 131-32).

By the time the court martial in Rennes reconvicted Dreyfus with “extenuating circumstances,” Burns has brought the reader to the same place of disbelief occupied by much of the world press and nearly all of the Anglophone world. Dreyfus’s pardon a short time later was no doubt influenced by threats of an international boycott against the Paris World’s Fair of 1900.

Burns’ last chapter looks at the legacy of the Dreyfus Affair, in film, literature, religion and politics. Looking at its effect on Léon Blum, and the ugly reappearance of virulent anti-Semitism in the thirties and during Vichy, Burns closes with Jacques Chirac’s apologetic “Letter on the Centenary of ‘J’Accuse,’ January 1998.” One hundred years later a French poll revealed that almost 70 percent of the population considered “the lessons of the Dreyfus Affair still of present interest” (p. 192). Burns’ tightly designed and beautifully executed little volume is an excellent way to revisit the event.

Vicki Caron’s *Uneasy Asylum* is a thoroughly researched, cogently argued, finely nuanced volume focusing on the Jewish refugee crisis that engulfed France from the time of Hitler’s ascension to power until the deportations to the death camps began and emigration from France ceased in 1942. Based on years of documentary research in twenty archives in Europe and the United States, this is a subtle work, carefully tracing the shifting responses of the French state, the French Jewish community, and French public opinion to multiple waves of emigration, largely from Central Europe. Caron’s search for continuities and discontinuities in French refugee policy and its application to Jewish immigrants elucidates subtle revisions in government policy in response to changing public opinion. She also detects worse treatment of Jews as compared to other refugees, perhaps because of the socioeconomic niche they presumably occupied. She breaks with other historians, including Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, in *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981), who argue that Vichy anti-Semitism was a continuation of French xenophobia. For Caron, while much xenophobia dovetailed with anti-Semitism because so many refugees were, in fact, Jews, by the time the Vichy government came to power, the “Jewish Question” had become a central concern of the French Right.

Looking at the period 1933-35, Caron agrees with many historians that the Depression and middle class pressure united to bring about restrictive immigration policy. Refugees were aggressively discouraged

from crossing the border and often harassed and denied work permits when they came. Without economic means, they were doomed. But Caron sees the Popular Front government waging a battle in France in favor of the refugees, with the leftist coalition anxious to help refugees from Nazism, but French public opinion expressing fear that those who fled Hitler were war mongers, who might undo French appeasement. As the stream of refugees became a flood after the Anschluss, public opinion, as evidenced in the media and political discourse, grew increasingly hostile.

The French Jewish community, according to Caron, was not of a single mind about responding to the crisis, as suggested in earlier works, but was deeply divided about whether to help the refugees and how to go about it. Caron depicts Raymond-Raoul Lambert as a man desperately trying to help Jewish refugees in the 1930s and later in his role as head of the Union Générale des Israélites de France. If some of the leaders of the Paris Consistory feared that Jews who had not assimilated into French culture threatened to evoke the same kind of anti-Semitism that had surfaced in the Dreyfus Affair, they did not represent the thinking of all their coreligionists, who Caron finds increasingly sympathetic to the refugees during the thirties. Moreover, they did not recognize that something had changed profoundly in France, for at no time during the affair, as Caron points out, did the government pass anti-Jewish laws, one of the very first acts of Vichy in 1940.

Caron argues hatred of communism, unwillingness to absorb refugees, and animosity toward all Central Europeans, who were blamed for bringing about the war and France's humiliation, even if the vast number of them were Jews fleeing Hitler, combined to put the "Jewish Question" squarely on the agenda of the Right when they came to power in the defeat. The need to rid France of unwanted refugees, who had no place to go during the war, after wild schemes such as resettlement in Madagascar were abandoned, led Laval to become an accomplice in the deportations in 1942. With Jews sitting in internment camps all over France, "repatriation" became an acceptable euphemism, especially since their departure meant at least some Jewish wealth would accrue to French beneficiaries.

Caron's study is a model of historical revision through careful archival research and questioning every assumption. It is a book I wish had been available when I did my own work on the Jews of Marseille, as an example of fine scholarship and a guide through the maze of refugee policy in the 1930s. It should be required reading for all graduate students in twentieth-century French history.

All three books highlight the evolving nature of our understanding of French Jewish history. Benbassa synthesizes recent scholarship with insight and the mature wisdom of many years of study and research in the field. Burns breathes new life into a well known cautionary tale and gives it wider context. Caron sets a benchmark for thorough archival research and provocative analysis. All of them are significant additions to French social history.

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