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Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France during the Second World War*. Trans. Nathan Bracher. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press in association with United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001. xxv + 601 pp. Photos, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-87451-896-2. \$34.95 U.S. (pk). ISBN 1-58465-144-X.

Review by Paul Jankowski, Brandeis University.

During the German occupation of France in the Second World War approximately one quarter of the Jews living in that country perished in the death camps of the east. This is less than in most other occupied countries of Western Europe--seventy-five per cent of the Dutch Jews and forty percent of the Belgian Jews died in the camps--and much less than in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet in the past twenty years or so the fate of the French Jews has generated a large and for the most part exemplary historical literature, capped by Renée Poznanski's *Jews in France during the Second World War*, first published in France in 1997 and now issued in translation by Brandeis University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The fundamental work on the subject remains that of Robert O. Paxton and Michael Marrus, *Vichy France and the Jews*, which first set out the responsibilities of the indigenous Vichy regime and its agents in the deportation of the Jews. Their book laid to rest a lingering mythology that treated the episode as an entirely German project assisted by a handful of French collaborators. Since then a flow of works has issued forth, of monographs about places and professions and organizations, of biographies about Pétain and those who in some way served him, and of memoirs by some of the same. Poznanski declines to assign precedence to any participant or agent or victim in the collective tragedy, for her line of inquiry encompasses in one way or another all previous research: how, she asks, did the approximately 300,000 Jews in France experience the occupation? Where Paxton and Marrus quite appropriately began at the summit, with the initiators, Poznanski views the terrain from the viewpoint of the recipients. This yields a work less judgmental in tone than theirs but just as erudite, engrossing, and convincing.

Indeed, the translated English title is more apt than the original French: *Jews in France* rather than *Les Juifs en France*. Poznanski's subjects constitute a collection rather than a collectivity, at best a powerless minority, united by religion and little else, certainly not the coherent subject of a coherent argument. Widely differing individuals and groups people these pages, their reactions to the irrational assault upon them as varied as themselves. The France in which they lived, to complicate matters further, no more lends itself to comfortable generalization than they do. One mosaic is superimposed upon another, and the result is a historical work of incomparable richness, unspoiled by theory or thesis or conceptual casuistry.

Still, the instinctive search for pattern drives the inquiry. Is there not a general progression from naïve incomprehension to adaptation and collective self-awareness, thence to flight, dissimulation, and new plans for the coming postwar era? At first shopkeepers in the occupied zone hopefully surrounded the obligatory yellow placards in their window with citations and decorations. Our only hope lies in the fact that Marshal Pétain is the Chief of State (p. 77), the president of the Central Consistory explained to its

members as late as March, 1941. But already, provoked by new census laws into introspection as well as adaptation, the most assimilated of Jews had taken stock of the situation. Some who had never had much time for the Consistory joined forces with it; others who had never belonged to worship associations began to join them. Later still, with much of the Jewish population scattered in hiding places all over the country, the establishment of the Conseil représentatif des Israélites de France announced a new emphasis on the cultural unity of the Jewish people, on the politics of the coming liberation, on Zionism, and on Palestine.

Yet, to survive, Jews also took shelter among Catholic and a Protestant families. Some converted. Some took to the underground and to violent resistance. Some sought even until the end to reason with their oppressors. And a few quietly outlived the whole ordeal. The multiple solutions to the Jews' dilemma emerged from their multiple interactions with a French environment made even more changeable and unpredictable by the unnatural circumstances of the occupation.

How anti-semitic were the French? Poznanski handles the treacherous question objectively and skillfully. The ambient society kept sending out contradictory signals to the beleaguered Jews. A sudden flurry of anti-semitism in some quarters in the summer of 1940 soon petered out. In 1941, in the occupied zone, anti-semitism seemed confined to the ultra-collaborationist minority and enjoyed little resonance in the Germanophobe population at large. In the southern zone evidence abounds of support for Vichy's anti-semitic laws and of open grassroots hostility to Jews in towns and villages. Yet many—especially French Jews—found discreet support and sympathy from friends. People found allies in their own social circles.

The introduction of the Yellow Star in 1942, far from creating a wave of anti-semitism as the Germans had hoped, provoked some outcries in the resistance—notably Communist—press and indignation among bystanders and religious (including Catholic) organizations. Meanwhile assaults both verbal and physical rose, the former from officialdom and the latter from the marginal ultra-collaborationist wings. Whom were the Jews to believe, whom to trust? The mass arrests of the same year provoked a stirring of sympathy here and there, which expressed itself in letters and declarations, especially from eyewitnesses to the round-ups and internments, but also from Catholic prelates and Protestant pastors. Yet in time the shock subsided; the voices of the Free French and the interior resistance mostly reverted to their general concerns and the population at large to its worsening privations.

From then until the Liberation anti-semitic hatred rose to new heights in the press, to little effect among a readership wholly preoccupied with daily living conditions. On the basis of all the evidence she can assemble, Poznanski concludes that the French clearly disapproved of the persecutions endured by the Jews, but a massive wave of anti-semitism, tied to the stereotypes of Jews as unassimilable foreigners or as exploiters a bit too bright for commerce, continued to haunt the imagination of a large number of people in France (p.382).

Historians have long known that a friendless foreign Jew, rumored to be a Communist to boot, was at greater risk in wartime France than a highly assimilated, well-established, and well-connected French Jew. And they have known that the Occupation intensified anti-semitism almost everywhere in Eastern and Western Europe. And they have known that when Jews were rescued, it was due to the intervention of individuals rather than of officialdom. But Poznanski shows all the other variants that doomed or saved so many, the complex elements of a single fate. She shows that the survival of three-quarters of the Jews of France resulted not from Vichy's policies, nor even from individual acts, but from the accidents of birth, background, and environment that determined vulnerabilities. Her book thus paints 300,000 different encounters between private lives and public policies, collectively amounting to the historical encounter between heterogeneity and happenstance. I doubt whether any one can challenge this diagramless pattern, nor whether any work will come closer to recapturing the experiences of the many different Jews of France during the Second World War.

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