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**Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron and Uri R. Kaufmann, Eds.** *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models*. London, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. vi + 245 pp. Index. €54.00 (cl.). ISBN 3-16-148018-X.

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The twelve essays contained in this volume were originally presented at a conference sponsored by the Leo Baeck Institute at Tutzing in May 2001. Each essay probes the conventional view that France and Germany represent two different paths of Jewish emancipation and modernization. This is a most welcome project precisely because no sustained examination of this subject has yet been undertaken. A particular strength of the volume is the comments that follow each essay. As a rule, these expand discussion in several directions and offer methodological insights as well as critical perspectives on the issues at hand. A thoughtful epilogue by Diana Pinto traces a number of earlier trajectories into the post-war era and the twenty-first century.

Nearly all of the essays focus on the social, political, and cultural impact and implications of political emancipation in the nineteenth century. Two exceptions to this general chronological framework are the valuable contributions by Simon Schwarzfuchs and Frances Malino. Drawing heavily upon census records and marriage contracts of the ancien régime, Schwarzfuchs offers extensive evidence of a shared religious culture that united Jewish communities on either side of the Rhine; regrettably, the author offers no indication as to how and when the much heralded cultural divergence between France and Germany unfolded.[1] Frances Malino credits proponents of the French Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment movement) with having formulated a distinct ideology of emancipation that reflected local political and cultural conditions during the revolutionary years. In making the case for distinctiveness, she disputes the overriding importance that historians have traditionally assigned to the Berlin Haskalah. In Germany social and cultural reforms were viewed as preconditions for the bestowal of civic equality, whereas in France such reforms were postulated as necessary in order to live an emancipated life. This thesis is challenged by commentator Dominique Bourel who questions the intellectual and cultural vitality of France in light of the absence of serious public debate about Jewish emancipation; the rather negligible interest in Hebraic and Judaic culture; the lack of debate on educational matters; and the relatively little interest in the German *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Bourel's insistence that there was no comparable readiness in France to think about the impact of emancipation, while correct for the immediate decades following the Revolution, requires qualification for the period starting from the 1830s.[2]

One clear indication of intellectual vitality among the Jews in France is furnished by Perrine Simon-Nahum in her essay on modern Jewish scholarship. She contends that the scientific study of Judaism reflected major intellectual and cultural differences in Germany and France. The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Germany approached the biblical text on the basis of hermeneutic principles derived from Protestant biblical criticism, especially philology. In the end practitioners of *Wissenschaft* concluded that the Bible was the product of human authorship. Ultimately, the movement exerted exceedingly little popular influence, however. In France Jewish scholars were heavily influenced by the emphasis that was placed on the study of ancient religions, and in particular, by the enormous importance attached to the historical transition from the spontaneity of the human spirit to reason. Nevertheless, philology did not enjoy the academic esteem it did in Germany; French Jewish scholars preferred to identify ancient Judaism with modern liberal political concepts. They asserted that ancient

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Jewish civilization was an integral part of the classical tradition and was still relevant to contemporary social concerns. On the basis of a distinction she draws between German philology and French classicism, Simon-Nahum maintains that the French devoted particular attention to the historical foundations and meaning of ancient Jewish texts. Here scholarship served political goals insofar as Jewish scholars in France enthusiastically depicted Judaism as the forerunner of the western spirit. While certainly attractive in theory, Simon-Nahum's explanation for the main difference between French and German scholarship suffers for not having been sufficiently grounded in the work of major French Jewish scholars such as Samuel Cahen and Salomon Munk.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition, as Nils Roemer suggests in his comments, Simon-Nahum may have overstated the distinctive nature of Jewish scholarship in the two countries, as indicated by her claim that Jewish historiography in France assumed a more universal character than was the case in Germany.

Several of the essays in the volume underscore the commonalties in the experience of French and German Jews in the nineteenth century. Uri Kaufmann, while conceding that there were significant disparities in the struggle leading to civic equality in France and Germany concludes that from a social-historical perspective the implementation of emancipation faced similar hurdles. Richard Cohen reaches a similar conclusion concerning the shared historical experience of French and German Jews. Focusing on the creation of magnificent synagogues in Munich, Berlin, and Paris, Cohen emphasizes what he calls "significant moments in the process of acculturation." In his view Jews exploited the emerging urban public sphere very effectively, as is evident in synagogue architecture, specially designed ceremonies, and dedicatory sermons. Such settings "communicated optimism, belief in the processes of integration and emancipation and above all a sense of belonging" (p. 66). Whether the pervasive sense of optimism described by Cohen was fully consistent with broader social conditions is rather doubtful, however. Commentator Jakob Vogel rejects the assumption that self-confidence was inherent in the public sphere, arguing that the positive thrust described in Cohen's essay may have reflected the perspective of the wealthy but not of the poor. Moreover, rabbis never acquired a comparable standing to that of Catholic or Protestant clergy—either in Germany or in France—thus leading Vogel to conclude that the emancipation project was far less successful than what one might otherwise conclude from Cohen's study.

Precisely when, if at all, one can speak of the emergence of two distinct national sentiments is a much disputed topic. Addressing herself to the issue that Schwarzfuchs had left open, Silvia Cresti argues that this was possible much later—only after 1870. Her argument is that German and French Jews defined their national identities using terms drawn from their respective national traditions. In the case of France, where broad participation in political life was theoretically open to all Jews, the Jewish religion remained a private concern. The result was a bifurcation between their political loyalty to France, on the one hand, and their religious loyalty to Judaism on the other. In Germany prior to 1870 there could have been no such dualism, but following unification ethnicity and culture were interwoven and the concept of the politicized ethno-cultural nation came to be embodied in *Kultur*. In France, a parallel development resulted in the identification of *civilisation* with distinctly French values. Cresti emphasizes that in France neither religion nor nationality were defined in ethnic terms. Within the context of discussion about the fate of the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine following the Franco-Prussian War, the *Archives israélites* stressed that nationality and citizenship were matters of choice, not ethnicity. This view rested on the assumption that religion belonged to the private sphere, and that the two spheres—the public and the private—had to remain completely independent from one another. In Germany no such separation was possible because the public sphere was permeated by religion. German Jews justified the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by referring to the linguistic, cultural, and historical ties of the region to Germany, claiming that they were, by descent, German.

Cautioning against the use of overly simplistic binary oppositions, commentator Sandrine Kott correctly observes that the comparative model runs the risk of overstating differences. What is needed in her

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opinion is a careful examination of Jewish identity within its particular social and cultural context, as part of a broader inquiry into national narratives. Jacques Ehrenfreund's article comparing German Jews and French Jews during the last third of the nineteenth century affirms Kott's insistence on the importance of national context for the study of Jewish identity. Ehrenfreund stresses the political benefits that Jews enjoyed in France, including their ability to penetrate the ranks of state and their identification with the republic, but also notes the unwillingness in France to tolerate a Jewish "minority culture." German Jews, by contrast, found that the civil service, the university, and the army were closed to them; alternatively, they developed a cultural identity that served them in place of the state. Commenting on Ehrenfreund's understanding of the difference in the way French and German Jews asserted their particularity, Paula Hyman argues that while Wilhelmine Germany was socially pluralist, it was far less hospitable to cultural pluralism than France. Moreover, the effects of antisemitism were less severe in France and, taken as a whole, the impact of political emancipation more impressive.

The contention that emancipation in France yielded more positive results than in Germany is supported by evidence of significant Jewish participation in civil service and politics. In the volume under review, much of the emphasis on the social foundations of emancipation draws directly or indirectly on the work of Pierre Birnbaum.<sup>[4]</sup> Birnbaum has charted the advances of French Jews in the military, civil service, and higher education; in exchange for these gains French Jews needed to disavow any semblance of public allegiance to their collective identity. German Jews, by contrast, were excluded from civil and state posts; their identity was expressed in a vigorous subculture, and they displayed their collective identity more openly. In his essay for this volume, Birnbaum endeavored to strengthen the argument by demonstrating that the careers of Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel typify the contrasting paths of emancipation. Birnbaum has found Durkheim to have been more positive in his identification with Judaism than is commonly assumed. He did not limit his Jewish identity to the private sphere and was attentive to the issues raised by Jewish scholars of his day. The frequent references to biblical examples, and his view of the Jewish community as a source of warmth that protected against suicide, as did marriage and widespread education, are taken to be emblematic of his Jewish commitments. Birnbaum posits that Durkheim's loyalty to Judaism came from the private sphere, and was thus consistent with his view of the world based on the Enlightenment and the Republic. Simmel, on the other hand, envisioned the "Judaisation" of society, that is, the embrace of society and the triumph of new values. Simmel, born to Jewish parents who had converted, nonetheless identified with the Jewish people. He saw European Jews as a classic case of strangers who are integral to the group but remain outside of it. Antisemitism was, therefore, a form of rejection of the Jew-Stranger who was profoundly integrated into society. Simmel, according to Birnbaum, "belonged" to the Jewish nation (p. 191), but was ignorant of Jewish culture, while Durkheim was culturally bound to Judaism but did not identify with the Jewish community. Valuable in its own right, the Birnbaum essay is not entirely successful in relating the particulars of these two men's lives convincingly to the question of emancipation.

In his analysis of French and German efforts to bring the fruits of emancipation to the Jewish communities of North Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, Eli Bar Chen found that the sense of Jewish collective responsibility invariably went hand in hand with a patronizing attitude toward Jews living in primitive conditions. According to Bar Chen and commentator Aron Rodrigue, the approaches of the *Alliance israélite universelle* and the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* were virtually identical, although Rodrigue calls attention to the French roots of this phenomenon, particularly as reflected in the nexus of emancipation and *régénération*. Nineteenth-century antisemitism offers further evidence, according to Christian Wiese, that relatively little distinguished the conditions under which French and German Jews lived. While conceding that the growing anti-Jewish invective was colored by local cultural, religious, and political forces, he views antisemitism primarily as an outgrowth of the crisis of modernity that affected Germany and France equally. But this basic similarity in ideology did not hold true for Jewish responses; in Wiese's view French Jews tended to be less vocal than their coreligionists in Germany. Disputing these claims, Vicki Caron argues that Jew-hatred in France was no less virulent,

violent, and pervasive than in Germany. She emphasizes the uniqueness of French antisemitism insofar as it was exploited by the French left as a means of attacking capitalism and the state. Ultimately, however, it was the attitude of the state that was determinative. French Jews gained access to all levels of civil and military service in the Third Republic, and even as late as the Vichy regime they viewed antisemitism as a betrayal of the citizenship with which they identified so strongly. Caron also points clearly to the fact that French Jews were more vigorous in their response to antisemitism than is commonly believed.

It is tacitly assumed that German Jewry enjoyed unequalled superiority in its cultural and intellectual productivity. Steven Aschheim very cogently describes the demographic, political, and intellectual forces that account for the greater originality and qualitative advantage of the Germans. He also attributes much importance to the bond between theology and philosophy that obtained in Germany but was severed in France. This, according to Aschheim, explains the fact that in Germany emancipation demanded reform of behavior and thought, facilitated through *Bildung*, whereas in France “this theologico-political predicament was largely absent.” (p. 205). The main lesson is that “Jews took their opportunities according to what was contextually available.” (p. 206) In France Jews focused on the political aspects of emancipation, whereas German Jews directed their energies to the cultural and intellectual arenas. The result was that in Germany the Jews were able to achieve “a highly productive critical and humanizing intellectuality, a body of significant scholarship skeptical of virtually all orthodoxies.” (p. 207). In the end, however, Aschheim retreats from the standard valorization of German Jewry by insisting that it, like French Jewry, was first and foremost a vulnerable minority and that the commonalities they shared, not the differences that separated them, deserve to be highlighted.

This important volume is truly a collaborative effort, as is reflected in the division of labor, the range of methodological and disciplinary approaches, and the constructive discussion initiated by the commentators. It would have been nonetheless helpful to readers if the repetition that inevitably accrues in an enterprise of this kind were removed or at least reduced. Also, one commentator, Nancy Green, aptly questions the typicality of the figures highlighted in the book, and urges greater rigor in identifying the social groups under examination. A more significant limitation is the general failure of this volume to consider seriously the impact of emancipation on the Jewish religion and the role of religion in helping Jews make sense of the changes in the social, cultural, and political landscape. At least some attention to religion in the emancipation era would have provided an additional — though no less crucial — basis for comparing the Jewish communities under examination. That said, the editors of *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered* are to be congratulated for having advanced the comparative study of European Jewry appreciably.

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## NOTES

[1] The question when and to what degree the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine broke with the more dominant Jewish culture of Germany (and Poland) has been an area of particular focus in my own research. Cf. Jay R. Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages: The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Culture in France, 1650-1860* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2004), chapters one and two.

[2] I have found that the role of the Revolution in the consciousness of French Jews evolved considerably during the half century following 1789. Until roughly 1830 there was relatively little attention to this issue; however, in the decades following the ascension of the July Monarchy, discussion was lively and wide-ranging. See Jay R. Berkovitz, "The French Revolution and the Jews: Assessing the Cultural Impact," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 20/1 (1995): 25-86; and *Rites and Passages*, chs. 4-6, 9.

[3] Samuel Cahen headed a project to translate the Hebrew Bible into French. See *La Bible* (Paris, 1831-1851). In addition, as founding editor of the Paris journal *Les Archives israélites de France* (1840- ), he published prolifically on numerous aspects of Jewish scholarship. References to several philosophical works published by Salomon Munk are furnished by Nils Roemer in his comments in the volume under review, p. 51.

[4] For two of Birnbaum's most significant works in this area, see *Les fous de la République : histoire politique des juifs d'Etat, de Gambetta à Vichy* (Seuil: Paris, 1992), and *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Hill and Wang: New York, 2000).

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