

THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE JEWS

by EZRA MENDELSON

Jacob Katz, *Anti-Semitism; From Religious Hatred to Racial Rejection*. Tel-Aviv, Am Oved, 1979, 378 p.

יעקב כץ, *שנאת ישראל; משנאת הדת לשלילת הגזע*, תל-אביבה עם עובד, תש"ם, 378 עמ'.

Modern anti-semitism has been the subject of countless studies — historical, sociological, and psychological. It is not difficult to explain the never ending flow of volumes devoted to the phenomenon of Jew-hatred. Anti-semitism in the post-Enlightenment, secular world is the classic example of religious and racial prejudice, and prejudice is of course a subject of great interest and importance. Moreover, the emergence of anti-semitism as a major political force in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lent it an importance above and beyond its interest as a cultural phenomenon. The modern history of Europe can hardly be written without reference to that hatred of Jews which formed an integral part of right-wing nationalism, a movement which dominated Central and East Central European politics in the immediate pre-World War II era, and did so much to plunge the world into war. If it is true that Jews have played a role in the history of Europe out of all proportion to their numbers, this is so not only with regard to their pioneering economic activities, or their outstanding intellectual achievements, but also to the importance of the remarkable degree of hostility which their presence inspired.

For historians of the Jewish people, of course, the pre-occupation with anti-semitism is obvious. Even more than in the annals of other peoples, the Jews'

Prof. Ezra Mendelsohn is Associate Professor of Contemporary Jewry and Russian Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The work under review has recently been published in English translation: *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981.

“foreign relations” have been of crucial important to their history. These foreign relations not only caused great suffering and, during World War II, unprecedented loss of life, but the Jewish reaction to anti-Semitism called into being new forms of Jewish behavior. The rise of modern Jewish nationalism, to cite only one example, is obviously associated with the rise of modern anti-semitism, although the exact relationship of the two movements is still the subject of controversy. Finally, anti-semitism and its place in the modern world is not only a major subject of Jewish scholarship but of contemporary Jewish polemics as well. To what extent is anti-semitism on the rise? To what extent is it inevitable? What is the proper Jewish reaction to it? These are questions which continue to agitate Jewish public opinion, dividing Jews into different ideological camps.

Professor Katz has now contributed a new study to the immense literature on anti-semitism. It is certainly the best single volume treatment of the subject, and is characterized by the profound learning and remarkable lucidity which we have come to associate with the author, one of the most prominent of Israel's modern Jewish historians. Professor Katz's new book surveys European attitudes towards the Jews during the course of over two hundred years. It commences with the Christian anti-semitism of the eighteenth century as summed up in Eisenmenger, and concludes with a brief analysis of Nazi anti-semitism. It deals with four countries — France, Germany, Austria, and Hungary — thus omitting from consideration both England, where anti-semitism has been traditionally a fringe movement, and Russia. It is perhaps to be regretted that Professor Katz chose to exclude the Russian Empire, where the bulk of the pre-World War I Jewish population in Europe resided and where anti-semitism reached such violent (at least by pre-World War I standards) proportions. But his main theme is the emergence of anti-semitism in enlightened, liberal and prosperous Europe, where the Jews had ostensibly integrated into the host societies, and not in the backward regions of the continent, where the Jews had largely not acculturated and where the impact of the enlightenment was relatively weak.

Professor Katz's method is basically that of the historian of ideas. While social and economic aspects are not ignored, what we have here is largely an analysis of how various major and minor European thinkers and publicists viewed the Jewish question. These include Voltaire, Renan, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Marx, and Wagner, as well as such famous popularizers of anti-semitism as Drumont and Stoecker. This study also describes the emergence of popular anti-semitic movements in Europe, which drew inspiration from the negative attitudes towards the Jews so deeply embedded, as the author shows, in European culture.

What emerges with great clarity from Professor Katz's penetrating analysis is that even those thinkers who were prepared to grant the Jews equality (and we must remember that the nineteenth century witnessed not only the rise of modern

anti-semitism, but also the emancipation of Central European Jewry), were basically not believers in pluralism. In other words, their willingness to grant equality was predicated upon their assumption that the Jews would totally disappear. This meant, in the view of Christian thinkers, conversion, and in the view of the secularists, total assimilation — the end of the Jews as a recognizable entity. The only real strangers in Europe must cease to be strangers by undergoing a kind of voluntary collective suicide.

But of course the Jews did not disappear, even if they did, at least partially, abandon their religion. Professor Katz is particularly stimulating when he shows that when the anti-semites claimed that the Jews remained a special group, clearly distinguished from the majority, they were stating the simple truth. Jews replaced Yiddish with German, French, or Hungarian, and dressed as did their gentile neighbours, but they maintained their own familial and socio-economic patterns, established their own organizations, and continued to feel a sense of brotherhood and responsibility for Jews in others lands. Jews became very prominent in certain branches of the economy, and in certain areas of cultural and scientific life, but not in others. They became active in certain political parties, particularly on the left, but not in others. Nowhere did they “blend” into the society of the majority.

Given the refusal of the Jews to disappear, despite their eager reception of emancipation and enlightenment, and given the preservation in the new Europe of the old, essentially Christian anti-Jewish stereotypes, so brilliantly demonstrated by Professor Katz, the survival of anti-semitism was assured. Moreover, the appearance and triumph of secular doctrines, among them nationalism and racism, often left no place at all for the Jew — in contrast to prevailing Christian attitudes in the pre-enlightenment, pre-secular world. In his revealing study of Voltaire’s attitude towards the Jews, the author shows how potentially dangerous (from the Jews’ point of view) was the triumph of secularism and rationalism. The combination of old stereotypes and the new secularism, the preservation of the Jews as a separate entity, and the social and economic crises which buffeted modern Europe, made possible that brand of political, mass-based anti-semitism which led to such disastrous consequences.

Having read Professor Katz’s book, it is difficult to be optimistic about the future of Jewish-Gentile relations. He has taught us that the centuries-old tradition of anti-semitism is central to European culture, and cannot be expected to disappear. The Jewish belief that additional doses of enlightenment will cure the disease is based on an illusion. He has shown, too, that everywhere in the Diaspora the Jews have preserved more of their traditional separateness than many Jews or opponents of anti-semitism would care to admit. This being the case, and given the instability of the modern world, the situation of Diaspora Jewry cannot be con-

sidered secure. In this sense, Professor Katz's message is a Zionist message, though his book is a model of scholarly objectivity.

Nonetheless, the Jews have been treated quite differently in different societies. In the United States, to cite the most obvious example, anti-semitism remains a fringe movement of no political importance, despite the presence of the largest Jewish community in the world, a community whose points of difference with the majority, Christian population are many and obvious. Perhaps this can be explained by the point made by Professor Katz in another context, namely that in America pluralism truly has been accepted as a cardinal doctrine of national faith.¹ That such was not the case in Europe is amply attested to in this outstanding book.

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1. See his remarks in *Scopus*, 31, Spring 1979, pp. 28–43 (especially p. 34).

CORRECTION

In David Tamar's article, "Yitzhak Baer — Scholar of the Second Temple Period" (*Immanuel* 12, p. 129–134), the passage on page 130, beginning on line 8, should have read "in his exhaustive articles on the religious and social trends in *Sefer Hasidim*, *Sefer Yosippon*, historical background of *Ra'ya Mehemna*, the Edicts of 1096, etc...". On page 134 of the article, the story by Hanoach Bartov is entitled "Here and There" and not "see a Name over There." We apologize to Dr. Tamar for these mistakes.