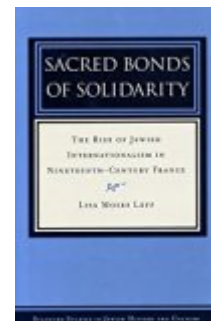


**Lisa Moses Leff.** *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 344 pp. \$63.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-5251-0.



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Jews in free and prosperous countries expose the conditions of their coreligionists who live under repressive regimes, amidst hostile populations, or in poverty elsewhere in the world. They protest on behalf of their less fortunate brethren. They write articles, make speeches, circulate and sign petitions, and lobby politicians. They raise money to relieve the sufferings of fellow Jews and support or create institutions that promise permanent improvements in their condition. This is solidarity, and it's just what Jews do. It's what they've always done. Or is it?

In her path-breaking book, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France*, Lisa Moses Leff shows that what seems natural today--international Jewish solidarity--emerged out of very specific nineteenth-century circumstances, especially in France. The instigating event was the Damascus Affair of 1840, the notorious blood libel that resulted in the torture and death of Jews falsely accused of killing a Capuchin friar and his servant for the "ritual" use of their blood. This judicial

outrage, over which the French consul had presided, incited the prominent Jewish lawyer and politician Adolphe Crémieux to intervene on behalf of the maligned and endangered Jews of Damascus. Together with the English Jewish leader Moses Montefiore, Crémieux traveled to Cairo to petition Mohammed Ali--governor of Egypt and de facto sovereign of Syria--to issue a declaration against the medieval (Christian) superstitions that charged Jews with ritual crimes. Although the activists only obtained a "pardon" for the accused, they initiated a worldwide movement for Jewish solidarity. A second case of anti-Semitism galvanized the international Jewish community in 1858, when papal police in Bologna seized a six-year-old Jewish boy named Edgardo Mortara from his family on the grounds that a servant had secretly baptized him. This kidnapping prompted the founding of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the international Jewish philanthropic society based in Paris and still in existence.

Although events such as the Damascus and Mortara affairs provided much of the impetus be-

hind expressions and actions of Jewish solidarity, Leff shows that the political culture of post-revolutionary France prepared the ground. Specifically, the discourse of *civilisation*, by which Jewish leaders justified their calls for French and international intervention on behalf of oppressed Jews in other countries, had emerged among liberal, republican, and (utopian) socialist advocates of secularism in France itself. Opposing the “throne and altar” policies of the reactionary *ultramontanes*, an alliance of Jews and Gentiles pursued an anti-clerical agenda in domestic and international affairs. For Gentiles on the Left, the support of Jews gave their movements an air of tolerance, modernity, and even religious fervor, though of a secular sort. For the Jews themselves, the coalition protected the vulnerable emancipation that revolutionary and Napoleonic France had bequeathed them.

The first two chapters of *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity* underscore the ambiguous and tenuous nature of Jewish emancipation in France. The revolutionary National Assembly passed legislation in 1790 and 1791 abolishing legal distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and guaranteeing the political rights (voting and serving in public office) of otherwise qualified Jews (i.e., propertied Jewish men) as “active citizens.” It simultaneously abolished the pre-revolutionary communities, the semi-autonomous corporations that had mediated the relationship between the French state and its Jewish population. Yet unlike other corporate bodies, Leff points out in a discussion of an often-forgotten feature of the revolutionary settlement, the Jews were held accountable for debts that their former communities had contracted under the Old Regime. (These debts were high due to the special taxes Jews had been required to pay in exchange for “tolerance.”) Beginning with an extraordinary intervention by the revolutionary Directory government and upheld in court cases as late as 1845, the practice of holding Jews collectively responsible for the debts of the abolished corporations was a flagrant violation of their emancipa-

tion. Other signs of second-class citizenship were the Infamous Decree of 1808, an exceptional Napoleonic measure designed to “regenerate” Alsatian Jews by prohibiting them from lending and lifted by the Restoration government in 1818, and the *more judaïco*, a special oath designed to humiliate and intimidate Jews in court and only abolished in 1846. Even the consistory system by which Napoleon regularized the status of the Jews in 1808 marked them as inferior. Unlike the Protestant consistories or the state-regulated Catholic Church, the Jewish consistories were not subsidized by the government until the liberal July Monarchy supplanted the Bourbon dynasty in 1830. This meant that for more than two decades Jewish consistory leaders had to act as tax collectors, squeezing their coreligionists for special contributions as they had been required to do under the Old Regime. Leff shows how abolishing these disabilities, and preventing the imposition of new ones—as anti-Jewish agitators on the Catholic right insisted that Jews had *too many* rights and worked for their denationalization—required all the political resources of “emancipated” Jewry, including like-minded Gentiles on the left. Incomplete as they were, however, the terms of the revolutionary and Napoleonic emancipation prepared nineteenth-century Jews to promote a vision of universal citizenship that would characterize their domestic and foreign agendas. In addition to the republican idea of “regeneration” through which Jewish (and other) citizens would renounce “particularist” loyalties and devote themselves to the common weal, practices as mundane as financing synagogues through government bonds rather than charitable contributions (after 1830) served to weld Judaism to the French state. Meanwhile, as Leff demonstrates in chapter 3, Jews in the arts, literature, and intellectual life reaffirmed a universalist conception of Judaism that “laid the groundwork for thinking of the French liberal state as having a mission to ‘liberate’ Jews all over the world” (p. 116).

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on Jewish internationalism itself. Chapter 4 discusses French Jewry's response to the plight of Algerian and Ottoman-ruled Jews between 1840 and 1860. It begins with a treatment of the Damascus Affair and Crémieux's use of the discourse of *civilisation* in protesting against the pernicious influence of the Catholic Church in that case. It goes on to investigate the response of French Jewish leaders to the conditions of their coreligionists in newly conquered Algeria. There French military officials were proposing anti-Jewish measures, including the expulsion of the colony's 20,000 Jews. Jewish activists in France promised the "regeneration" of their Algerian brethren, whom they regarded as backward, and borrowed the language of the *mission civilisatrice* from liberal colonialists to describe the envisaged moral and intellectual improvement. With the help of liberal allies they persuaded the French government to establish a consistory system in Algeria in 1845, though without succeeding in obtaining French citizenship for the colony's Jews. The chapter also discusses French Jewish responses to the Crimean War (1853-56). In this conflict Jews joined liberals in arguing that the kind of religious strife which incited the war—a dispute over whether the Orthodox or Catholic Church would have the keys to the holy sites of Jerusalem—could only be resolved by a thorough reform of Ottoman law and institutions. They praised the postwar *hatti Humayun*, a set of constitutional laws that among other things reduced discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation, as a triumph of *civilisation*. The implication was that any discriminatory laws at home, which ultramontanists advocated, would make France less civilized than a regime long reputed to be the epitome of "oriental" despotism.

Chapter 5 takes the story of Jewish internationalism into the 1860s and 70s. Leff recounts the founding of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in 1860 and examines solidarity both as a figure of political rhetoric and an actual cultural practice. The word *solidarité*, we learn earlier in

the book, was originally a legal term coined in the Napoleonic era to describe the condition in which any member of a group is liable for the group's debts—precisely the condition of post-revolutionary Jews, according to many Genite litigants and their advocates. In 1839 the (non-Jewish) republican writer Pierre Leroux first used the term "as a social and political ideal rather than a juridical fact" (p. 172), and in 1851 the Jewish republican journalist Jules Carvallo employed it to denote the shared destiny and interests of Jews and other people who suffered from social or legal disabilities. From its inception the AIU regularly used the term similarly, and though its leaders insisted on the moral obligation of emancipated Jews to their less fortunate coreligionists, they often added that Judaism's ultimate goal was *tikkun olam*—to heal the world—thus bringing about the liberation of humanity. The chapter also examines solidarity as a practice, focusing on the campaign to emancipate the Jews of Romania. In the aftermath of the Crimean War the Ottoman principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia achieved a measure of autonomy which would eventually lead to Romanian independence in 1878. Repeatedly during the 1860s and 70s the AIU urged European governments not to recognize the kingdom unless it guaranteed equal rights to Jews. Ultimately this attempt failed, and Romania emerged with an anti-Semitic constitution, but Leff argues that by advocating on behalf of Romanian Jewry, French Jewry highlighted the republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. "Jewish solidarity in the name of these ideals was not understood as a particularist endeavor," Leff writes. "Rather, it was to be an example for the rest of humanity, showing them how people living far away from each other could share basic values. In this way, the Alliance was not seeking to separate Jews from the rest of humanity, but to foster a larger, global solidarity" (pp. 198-99). This humanist project also highlighted the ideals of French republicanism and thus aimed at shoring up the position of the Jews in France itself.

The discourse of Jewish internationalism was nevertheless vulnerable to attack by anti-Semites who translated expressions of solidarity into signs of an international conspiracy, as Leff shows in chapter 6. (Never mind that conspiracies are secret, whereas Jewish contributions to international policy discussions were published for all the world to see. Anti-Semites proudly “exposed” plots by using the Jews’ own publications.) According to Leff, political anti-Semitism emerged quite suddenly in France with the publication of Edouard Drumont’s notorious *La France Juive* in 1886, though sporadic complaints about “Jewish power” date from the late 1860s. Even the anti-Semitic movement in Algeria, initiated in reaction to the decision of Crémieux (now minister of justice) to grant citizenship to the colony’s Jews in 1870, remained a decidedly local matter, in Leff’s view, with attempts to transfer anti-Jewish anger to the metropole regularly failing. In the wake of *La France Juive*, Jewish organizations in France became more circumspect in their invocation of solidarity, international or otherwise. It was this tactical and quite recent retreat, not a long history of Jewish reluctance to engage in politics (as Hannah Arendt suspected), that explains the relative caution with which Jewish leaders came to the defense of Captain Dreyfus in the 1890s, though Leff argues (citing the recent work of Pierre Birnbaum) that even here the quiescence of the French Jewish community has been overstated.

*Sacred Bonds of Solidarity* is extremely well written and meticulously researched. It is based on archival materials from a dozen repositories in France, Israel, and the United States. Leff is equally adept at institutional history (of the AIU or the consistories, for example) and discourse analysis. Her study reconstructs both the practical and rhetorical aspects of international Jewish solidarity. Overall, it is an important contribution to our understanding of French Judaism in the post-revolutionary period. Though not the first to challenge the long-held belief that emancipation required French Jews to relegate their religious be-

liefs to the private realm, Leff is the first to demonstrate the importance of international affairs to the nationally based politics of Jewish self-defense. Solidarity with oppressed Jews abroad enabled French Jews to underscore the revolutionary values of liberty, equality, and fraternity and thus to fight for the principles behind their own emancipation. Coalitions with anti-clerical liberals, republicans, and socialists were mutually beneficial; they provided Jews with much-needed allies, and they publicized the tolerance and (paradoxically secular) religiosity of the anti-clerical Gentiles. This story is therefore of interest both to specialists in Jewish history and to French historians more generally.

to the political rights (voting and serving in public office)&#160;

of “active citizens.”

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