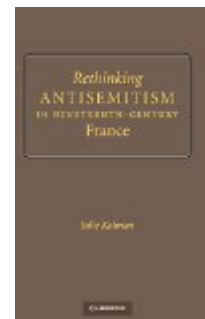


Julie Kalman. *Rethinking Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xii + 234 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-89732-7.



Reviewed by Jeffrey Haus

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

In this book, Julie Kalman (University of New South Wales) performs a major service for the field of French Jewish history. Investigating the years between 1814 and 1848, she illuminates a period that tends to slip through the cracks of historical research. The decades between the fall of Napoleon and the end of the July Monarchy have long been considered peaceful ones for French Jewry, especially in comparison to the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, the Third Republic, and of course, Vichy. Kalman persuasively argues, however, that the Restoration and July Monarchy have much to teach us about the nature of French attitudes toward Jews in nineteenth-century France. During this period, she writes, French Jews faced constant challenges to their status as citizens from both the Right and Left. Catholic radicals transposed traditional anti-Jewish themes, such as Jewish usury, “blindness,” and deicide, into more modern motifs of excessive greed and cultural, religious, and even physical otherness. Socialist thinkers adopted parallel views of Jews as morally inferior, corrupted by the capital-

ism they had created to the point that they became unfit for citizenship (as well as physically repulsive). Kalman concludes that these issues and images represented continuity with French anti-Jewish sentiments left over from previous centuries; they also simultaneously framed the so-called Jewish Question in France for the rest of the nineteenth century, questioning not only Jewish citizenship, but also the modern French society that allowed them to become citizens in the first place. Kalman bolsters her argument with meticulous research, displaying an impressive command of sources, including political writings, the French press, drama, literature, and portraiture.

Part of Kalman’s contribution lies in her book’s focus beyond the circles of known anti-Semites: she focuses on “those who chose to use Judaism to define alterity” instead of on negative portrayals of Jews and attacks against them (p. 9). Perceptions of Jewish otherness therefore form the book’s main thrust. As the French social, political, and economic context shifted, French Jews

remained the subjects of repeated “assessment and redefinition by their non-Jewish fellow citizens” (p. 19). Kalman’s approach enables her to question the “terms in which alterity was framed,” which in turn helps her to peel back the layer of the period’s supposed tranquility (p. 9). The different strategies for addressing the Jewish Question, she argues, all contained a common theme: namely, the need to navigate a reordered world in the wake of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. They also drew on largely Catholic roots, Catholicism symbolizing the traditional world undone by three decades of revolution and war. Consequently, Kalman argues that such thinkers as Louis de Bonald and Félicité de Lamennais, among others, conceived of an exclusive citizenship rooted in French Catholicism.

This conception left little room for French Jewish citizens, save those who converted to Catholicism. Kalman’s third chapter provides a closer look at the views of some notorious French Jewish converts—particularly David Drach and the Ratisbonne brothers—than previously available. Kalman does well illustrating the connection between the opinions of the Catholic Ultras and converts like Drach, who wrote extensive indictments of Judaism following his baptism in 1823. In the following chapter, she lumps Drach with Simon Deutz as two converts who attacked Judaism without ever receiving the full acceptance of their Catholic fellow citizens (indeed, Deutz became something of an outcast). In their stories, Kalman argues, one finds evidence of eternal qualities being assigned to Jews. Instead of simply “other,” Jews now became undesirable; moreover, their undesirable qualities now became immutable.

The material in these two chapters has largely escaped close reading in recent years, and Kalman’s discussion of them is illuminating. Unfortunately, her argument here tends to lean on deductive reasoning. Kalman contends, for example, that “it is not conceivable that some young and talented Jews, seeking to make their way in

the world, would have experienced a continuing sense of isolation in a society still imbued with Christian significance.... Jews living in Restoration France could not but be influenced by the power that nascent Christianity wielded in the society in which they wished to participate” (p. 48). This assumption forms the main contextual point for her examination of Drach’s conversion, an investigation that rests mainly on Drach’s own writings. Drach, in Kalman’s view, converted out of a desire to scale the “unyielding wall” dividing Christian and Jewish existence rather than in an opportunistic quest for personal gain (pp. 50-52). Yet her argument does not fully engage the possibility of Drach intentionally downplaying his own opportunism, especially as he sought support and acceptance in the Catholic world.

In a clever twist to the book, Kalman contrasts these views of Jews with those present in the African colonies. Kalman contends that the Orient furnished French artists and writers with vehicles for expressing desires not permitted by the culture of the July Monarchy. Projecting their desires abroad, men like Victor Hugo and Eugène Delacroix created equivalence between concepts of “Jewish” and “Oriental.” These images, however, varied according to gender. As Kalman demonstrates, marked differences existed between portrayals of the Oriental Jewess as beautiful, sensual, and pure; and her male counterpart, the Jew, who was distorted by his love of money into an ugly, dissembling, corrupting creature. Their marriage contaminated the Jewess with the Jew’s money lust, sapping her natural beauty. For such writers as Charles Didier, this dichotomy became a metaphor for indicting the materialism and greed of European society.

These perceptions of Jews found their way into the Damascus Blood Libel of 1840. Segments of the French press, Kalman argues, combined the idea of the sensual, barbarous Orient with the image of the deceitful Jew. As press accounts fanned the flames of outrage toward Jews, conservative

French politicians, among them Adolphe Thiers, capitalized on the fear of “Jewish power.” Utilizing themes of Jewish financial and media influence, they once again questioned Jewish status within French society. In this manner, Kalman argues, Oriental portrayals of Jews migrated back to France in a new understanding of “Jewishness” among Catholic radicals and opponents of the Orleanist regime. For them, Jewishness meant greed and disloyalty, the overarching symbol of which was the wealth Jews accumulated by exploiting France and its people.

The mass of these anxieties, according to Kalman, coalesced in the person of Baron James de Rothschild. In a perceptive and incisive point, Kalman shows how Rothschild’s involvement in developing the French national rail system made him a convenient symbol of the tension between local and national interests, and traditional regional power versus centralized government technocrats. Rothschild’s Judaism (and lack of French citizenship) enabled socialist writers like Charles Fourier to take a rather small step from railways to capitalism generally. Rothschild the man thus transformed into what Kalman terms the “Rothschild-Jew,” a symbol of the corrupting influence of capitalist competition on French morality.

The final chapter maps changes in definitions of the Jewish Question in France, which Kalman frames as the questions raised by Jewish citizenship in the formerly “orderly world” of the ancien régime. This chapter outlines a schematic system of opinions about Jews employing views of Jewish usury, moral inferiority, antisocial behavior, and ultimately, danger to the French nation. Kalman concludes that by the 1840s, some of the more radical Catholic writers utilized the characterization of Jews as “inhuman” as a springboard for representing the French “anti-citizen” *par excellence* (pp. 184-185).

By the end of the book certain questions and ambiguities persist. Kalman might have pushed her analysis a little further in terms of consider-

ing the significance of the schematic she has constructed. Isolating the study strictly within her chosen period constrains her from connecting these themes with later developments, as well as the broader context of European hostility toward Jews. Although she acknowledges this constraint in the introduction, doing so clouds the significance of her interesting material and astute analysis. For example, did the portrayal of Jews as inhuman in this literature predate the wider adoption of this idea elsewhere in Europe, or did it influence that idea as it evolved outside of France? How was it related to the metamorphosis of medieval Catholic hostility toward Jews into nineteenth-century anti-Semitism? Most important, the Jews themselves are largely left out of the discussion. How did French Jews respond to attacks by Drach, Ratisbonne, Didier, and others? Did they adjust any of their actions or institutions to address these challenges?

Nevertheless, this book represents a solid, sophisticated, and undoubtedly significant contribution to our understanding of an overlooked period in Jewish history. Readers will find the chapter on the Damascus Affair especially enlightening and useful as a teaching resource (I plan on using it for one of my own classes). Kalman should be commended for producing a valuable study that raises important questions while offering new perspectives on the French Jewish experience.

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