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Michel Winock, *La France et les juifs de 1789 à nos jours*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2004. 385 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index of proper names. 22€. (pb.). ISBN 2-02-060954-1.

Review by Jeffrey Haus, Kalamazoo College.

For more than twenty years, Michel Winock has been an important scholar of French anti-Semitism. In two previous books—*Edouard Drumont et Cie* (1982) and *Nationalisme, Antisémitisme, et Fascisme en France* (1990)—he has studied the relationship between political attacks on French Jews and opposition to French republicanism. In his new book, *La France et les juifs*, Winock seeks to synthesize more than two centuries of thinking about the “Jewish Question” in France. The result is a series of essays that combine the political and intellectual history of French anti-Semitism with the views of important French intellectuals, notably Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom Winock devotes an entire chapter.

The first two chapters deal with the little more than a half-century (roughly 1791–1858) during which French Jews received emancipation and achieved a degree of social, economic, and political integration in France. These chapters neatly summarize existing historical scholarship, laying out themes well known to students of French Jewish history: the expectation of integration (some would say “assimilation”) that accompanied the extension of equal Jewish civic rights, and how the emancipation process and its aftermath shaped anti-Jewish prejudice. Mainly, these chapters set the stage for the rest of the book, which charts the evolution of and variations on these basic themes through the present day. Succeeding chapter titles follow a chronological path through the Mortara Affair, and the Crémieux Decree. The first section of the book culminates with two chapters on the Dreyfus Affair, whose conclusion marked what Winock terms a “republican victory” (p. 152). The Dreyfus case, he argues, mobilized the forces of republicanism, and “gave the Republic its letters of *noblesse morale*: the Affair was its *eau lustrale*” (p. 156). It also stimulated what Winock calls in the subsequent chapter a “second integration” between 1906 and 1930. During this period, French anti-Semitism declined while Jews aligned themselves even more closely with republicanism and, by extension, the French state.[1]

The Vichy period marks the next stage of Winock’s analysis. The Vichy government’s complicity in the deportation and annihilation of Jews gave rise to a new sensibility seeking reconciliation between Jews and non-Jews, symbolized by the doctrines of the Second Vatican Council. Winock identifies another watershed in the Six-Day War, when the Gaullist government backed away from its previously close military and economic relationship with Israel. French Jews responded by affirming their Jewishness publicly. The confluence of these two factors set the course, in Winock’s view, for the resuscitation of anti-Semitism in the 1970s. He traces this process through the debate over the guilt of the Vichy regime, and on into contemporary times with the outbreak of renewed violence against French Jews.

As enticing as this interpretation sounds, it rests upon significant assumptions about the politics of being Jewish in modern France that may or may not fit with other historical evidence. Although Winock does not explicitly state any definition for what constitutes a valid expression of Jewish identity, the episodes he emphasizes tend to focus on non-Jews contemplating what being Jewish must be like, while relegating French Jews themselves to the sidelines. In this sense, his analysis echoes the formulations of Sartre, who saw Jewishness as a condition generated beyond the individual Jew. Consequently, the book implies that an initial passivity pervaded French Jewry from the emancipation in 1791 until the end of the Second World War, interrupted only by the Mortara Affair in 1858. That hiccup aside, the political history of French Jewry consisted of Jews refraining from public engagement

on their own behalf or on the part of their coreligionists. The leaders of French Jewry even avoided injecting their community *qua* community into the Dreyfus Affair. Only with the Shoah and the birth of the State of Israel did French Jews begin, little by little, to assert themselves publicly as Jews. The Six-Day War in 1967 and, in the last decade, the onset of the “New Anti-Semitism”—in which opposition to the State of Israel rebounds into hatred of Jews—have accelerated this march toward a “public” (my term, not his) Jewish identity. French Jews, in this view, played little or no role in shaping their own destiny, identity, or status within France.

This methodology constructs an extremely narrow field for the conduct of French Jewish life. In short, if it did not happen in the press, in the National Assembly, or in some other civic venue, it did not happen at all. Such an approach neglects lower-profile instances in which French Jewish leaders asserted their Jewishness, notably in negotiations with government officials over education. In lobbying for authorization to open a central rabbinical academy during the first decades of the nineteenth century, for example, Jewish leaders persistently maintained the uniqueness and importance of Judaism in French life. While political, cultural, and financial forces compelled them to accommodate the school’s curriculum to French University standards, they steadfastly advocated the continuing relevance of Jewish tradition for French Jewry and the rabbis’ public role in sustaining that tradition.[2] Certainly, anyone familiar with Winock’s previous work will not be surprised to find that he employs an intellectual and political rather than a social methodology; and no author should be taken to task for writing a 400-page book instead of an 800-page one. That said, the discourse about Jews and Judaism in France did not disappear from Jewish circles between 1791 and 1945, and these internal discussions and debates informed the relationship between French Jews and their country at least as much as the external forces the book analyzes.

La France et les juifs does, however indirectly, raise important questions regarding the meaning of Jewish integration in France. Most significantly, perhaps, the book indirectly calls into question the meaning of the term “integration.” In the second chapter, for example, Winock writes that the emancipation of Jews engendered integration in the form of social advancement and economic success. While integration occurred more quickly for those at the top of the economic ladder, those on the lower rungs integrated more gradually. Signs of integration appeared first in the world of finance, then in the liberal professions and the arts (p. 34-6). Yet, as in his analysis of Jewish identity formation, Winock relies on external factors as proof that an internal process of integration has, in fact, occurred. Clearly, large numbers of French Jews considered themselves “integrated”: by the middle of the nineteenth century, the word had largely disappeared from Jewish public discourse when referring to native-born Jews, reappearing during the *fin de siècle* when immigrants from eastern Europe began to arrive in greater numbers. Just as clearly, though, French anti-Semites in no way accepted the idea that Jews were French in the same way they themselves were. The concept of integration thus remained fluid through the end of the First World War, when “the Jews of France had demonstrated their patriotism by paying (in terms of war dead) a little more than the average Frenchman; they could [therefore] hope to be ‘integrated’ into the nation for which so many of them...had given their lives”(p. 174). Winock implies that “integration” was, however, not yet complete as a result of the persistence of French anti-Semitism. Integration, however, remains a slippery concept cloaked in multiple shades of gray; how, then, to know when it is “complete”? A clearer idea of what integration meant to French Jews is essential to understanding what “complete” means in this context, and how anti-Semitism affected Jewish concepts of Frenchness and Jewishness.

In this way, the book follows an intellectual tradition most clearly exemplified by Sartre, who claimed that Jews have been defined by others rather than themselves (“The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew.”).[3] Ironically, this formulation projects Sartre himself—who of course, was not Jewish and therefore constitutes one of these “Others”—into the process of Jewish identity formation. Seizing for himself the power to define what a Jew is, Sartre concocted a self-fulfilling proposition: even those who have taken issue with him have had to respond based on his original definition. By approaching the

relationship between France and its Jews from outside the Jewish population, *La France et les juifs* creates a similar dynamic in which French Jewish identity is shaped nearly entirely from the outside. As a result, Winock's book subtly and implicitly reveals more about *La France* than about *les juifs*.

NOTES

[1] In this respect, Winock follows the argument of Paula Hyman, who calls the period between Dreyfus and the fall of the Popular Front a "golden age of symbiosis" for French Jewry. See Paula S. Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York, Columbia University, 1979), p. 33.

[2] See, for example, my article, "How Much Latin Should a Rabbi Know? State Finance and Rabbinical Education in Nineteenth-Century France," *Jewish History* 15 (2001):59-86.

[3] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Antisemite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 69.

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