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Philipp Lenhard, *Volk oder Religion? Die Entstehung moderner jüdischer Ethnizität in Frankreich und Deutschland 1782-1848*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014. 413 pp. Maps, bibliography, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9783525310250.

Review by Sarah E. Wobick-Segev, The University of Western Ontario.

In his doctoral dissertation, completed at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich and recently published with Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Philipp Lenhard seeks to answer an ambitious question: what did it really mean to be a Jew in France and Germany between 1782 and 1848? These years represented a critical era in the process of Jewish emancipation, a time when civic and legal discussions about Judaism among Jews and non-Jews influenced Jewish self-identification. The period also not incidentally witnessed a major transformation in Jewish self-awareness--a time when Judaism in France and in German lands stopped being a way of life (and Jews a people chosen by God and governed by divine law) and was ostensibly transformed instead into a confessional or religious category. The transformation of Jews (*Juden* or *juifs*) into Israelites (*Israeliten* or *israélites*) becomes, according to the author, the dominant narrative for the history of the modernization of the Jews of France and Germany in this period. Jews not only left the ghetto, but left behind an ethnic self-identification for a confessional one.

Seeking to redress this narrative, Lenhard's central goal in *Volk oder Religion?* is to place the question of Jewish ethnicity, not merely back into the discussion, but at the very heart of Jewish transformation and modernization in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. From his opening pages, the author maintains that, "Jewish ethnicity--read, the awareness of belonging to a specific Jewish community of descent [*Abstammungsgemeinschaft*]-played a role in the process of this modernization [i.e., the modernization of Jewishness, *Judentum*]" that not only corresponded with the transformation in religious consciousness but also in some ways contradicted it" (p. 8). In short, ethnic depictions were not a "relic of the past" (p. 28), but part of modern debates about Jewish self-definition and instead of abating in the first half of the nineteenth century, these attitudes persisted in Jewish and non-Jewish circles.

In order to prove this thesis, Lenhard situates the question of the transformation and modernization of Jews and Judaism in an overlapping set of contexts: the intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and modern nationalism; the emergence of modern history as a discipline and as a way of understanding different groups and peoples; the political and civic emancipation of the Jews; and the Jewish Reform movement and the latter's discontents. From these interwoven perspectives, Lenhard notes the various and multifaceted attempts to change or conversely preserve Judaism, exploring the debate between those who sought to create a confession or religion, and those who strove to preserve an "ethnic" sense of self.

To these ends, Lenhard divides his study into four main sections, in addition to a historiographically- and theoretically-based introduction and a conclusion. The first section, itself divided into three, begins with an extended introduction into early modern Jewish life and self-understandings. The second and third parts take up the question of collectively defining the Jews and place it in the context of new models for group self-description, namely "race," "nation," and "people [*Volk*]." Here the author frequently points to

how non-Jews defined or sought to define the Jews. Attitudes about Jews would be critical to their potential place in the nation-state and would influence their own answers to questions of inclusion and exclusion.

The second section is the book's strongest. Set in a time of greater historical consciousness and nation-building in France and Germany, the author explores early definitions of citizenship (and the role of descent therein, even in the seemingly liberal French citizenship laws) and about the place of Jews as potential citizens of the state. Despite the apparent growing confessionalization of Judaism and the move away from "*am israhel*" (Hebrew for "people of Israel"), Lenhard uses the section to unpack the various and evolving options for ethnic self-definition that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For instance, the author contrasts the typical presentation of French Judaism after the *Grand Sanhedrin* and *décret infâme* of Napoleon. Thus, instead of telling how French Jews supported the transition to an official Franco-Judaism and rejected any particularistic claims from the early nineteenth century onwards, Lenhard focuses on those individuals who continued to challenge this transformation. Jews and Christians could be and must be brothers, according to Lenhard's readings of the imminent Talmudist Joseph David Sinzheim, but this did not automatically mean that Judaism had to become an "exchangeable individual faith." As Lenhard concludes, "the awareness of a collective unity did not have to be abandoned" (p. 135). Figures such as Sinzheim, Moses Mendelssohn and Zakind Hourwitz were all willing to accept modernity as long as it did not contravene with the *halakhah* (Jewish law) and with the unity of the Jews as both a "religious community and one of descent" (p. 136).

It is in these discussions that the *maskil* (i.e., follower of the Jewish Enlightenment) David Friedländer is characterized as a revolutionary for imagining a time when "no one in Europe will be asked who is a Jew or a Christian; since the Jew too will live according to European laws and contribute to the best [interests] of the State" (p. 159). The author spends much of the remaining section pointing to various Jewish figures in Germany and France who began to make serious and direct attacks against ethnic self-understandings. Lenhard then notes the reactions of two camps within the Jewish community to these attempts to strip Judaism of any ethnic characterization. On the one hand, he notes the vociferous nature of the observant, proto-Orthodox reaction; and, on the other hand, he points to a general disinterest, perhaps even apathy, among secular Jews regarding these same changes. In this context, the reader is able to assess the controversial nature of individuals such as Reformer Samuel Holdheim whose ideas, and even very presence, in the Jewish community remained highly contested.

The last chapter in the second section, "Ambivalent converts," is an interesting study of Jews who had converted religiously, but nevertheless maintained some affiliation to the idea of a Jewish ethnicity. Among others, Lenhard cites the fascinating example of Wolfgang Bernhard Fränkel who made the remarkable claim that, "Through [my] conversion to Christianity not only did I not stop being an Israelite, but rather I believe that I became only through the Spirit of the Gospels a true son of Israel" (pp. 179-180). One wonders here, however, whether this was an example of lingering ethnic self-identification or an attempted return to a purportedly more historical Christianity?

The third section explores the widespread backlash against the Reform movement's insistence on confessionalizing Judaism. In it, the author covers some well-known controversies, including the establishment of the Hamburg Reform Temple and its Orthodox detractors. Much of the debate between reformers and the Orthodox centred on the lengths to which Jews must conform and change in order to integrate, and what types and forms of change Judaism could accept. Yet, we should note that whether or to what extent one could remain different within the emerging states was very different than self-understanding, even if it influenced this integration. The distinctions between the two camps, it must be added, exposed rifts far deeper than the question of Jewish identity as an ethnic category. Other examples cited in this section include the conservative movement and how it made its own connections to a "history and culture of an ancient people" (p. 214), as well as figures such as Simon Bloch, founder and editor of the *Univers Israélite*, who tried to set Judaism and Jewish identity on the connected pillars of descent and

religion: "one was born a Jew and through that fact alone one was obliged to remain true to the entire Torah" (p. 223).

The fourth section places the topic of Jewish ethnic identity into a larger story of the place of Jews in history. In various attempts to see Jews as collective historical actors, Lenhard explores examples of Jewish Hegelianism (including the earliest writings of Moses Hess) and Saint Simonianism. Here the author seems to point these discussions towards a larger historical-philosophical narrative. Yet, its conclusions are less than clear. One wonders if the quite peculiar forms of self-identification voiced by individuals, such as Moritz Veit, are anything more than outlying exceptions.

From the beginning of the work, Lenhard gives the reader a sense that his book is an intellectual history of a road not taken. Yet the insistence that religion won out over ethnicity is really only a matter of perspective and one's chosen subject of investigation. It rests largely on a teleological formulation, instead of viewing the two terms as evolving in mutual interaction and changing over time. By focusing largely on Reform theologians, consistorial rabbis, or on the rhetoric surrounding Jewish emancipation, much of the material necessarily confirms what many were trying to outwardly prove—that Judaism and Jews could be made compatible to the modern state. These were the very Jewish voices that argued that Judaism needed to be seen and presented as a confession in order for Jewish emancipation to appear possible and acceptable. But few Jewish thinkers were only ever just interested in emancipation; discussions of the new place of Jews, of the new content and form of Jewishness and Judaism reflected more than legal-civic debates. In short, what it meant to be Jewish was not merely a political question.

To pit ethnic and confessional self-definitions against each other, in some senses, is to create a false dichotomy. The modernization of Judaism in Germany and France that entailed its confessionalization was never a full, complete or uncomplicated process. Lingering ethnic self-conceptions, frequently worded differently though to the same effect (i.e. those who saw their Jewishness in terms of descent, family loyalty, or parentage), always remained a part of the daily lives of many Jews in Paris and Berlin. They did not simply reappear in late nineteenth century. Perhaps these expressions of ethnic self-understandings could be heard much more on the street and in the association than in the synagogue.

The modernization of German and French Jews entailed their secularization whereby definitions of Jewish selfhood were given over to the individual, just as political rights were accorded to the same individual. Leora Batnitzky's quick formula is worth noting here. She suggests that, "Prior to modernity... Judaism was not a religion, and Jewishness was not a matter of culture or nationality. Rather, Judaism and Jewishness were all these things at once: religion, culture, and nationality."^[1] But we must also note that this is a historian's shorthand, using new terms anachronistically (as Lenhard does with terms such as Germany or Orthodoxy). Scholars of this period face a particular challenge and we should appreciate these challenges. We can use descriptive, scholarly terms like ethnicity to speak of a long-standing "awareness of belonging to a specific Jewish community of descent" (p. 8), but we must nonetheless remember that ethnic self-identification—i.e., individualized, secularized, and stripped of its larger historical-religious roots—is far from old (or a "relic"). Heine and others like him clearly were not using an old set of ideas, but leaning on one side of a set of once-interconnected attributes when he defined Jewishness as "common descent, manner of thought, and suffering" (p. 280).

As a comparative study, Lenhard rightly and importantly notes that the histories of Jews in France and Germany are interwoven. The importance of the figure of Moses Mendelssohn in both contexts serves as a clear example of this. I was struck, however, by Lenhard's assertion that French-Judaism became a "Protestant"-like religion along the German-Jewish model, suggesting that the former was imported into France or, more intriguingly, that French-Judaism and German-Judaism were not distinct to begin with. This might be true at the level of ideas and intellectual contacts, but in form and in education, Catholicism made its mark in the form of Jewish Catechisms written in both in German and French throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.^[2]

Scholars new to discussions of Jewish emancipation in France and Germany and to the early history of the Reform movement will find valuable information in the book and those well versed in the field will hear some new voices. The field of European Jewish history is also richer for a comparative work that highlights the clear commonalities between two countries that are often seen as distinct cases of religious reform and emancipation.

NOTES

[1] Leora Batnizky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 2.

[2] Consider Jeremiah Heinemann, *Profession de foi pour les israélites par demandes et réponses : à l'usage de ceux qui donnent la confirmation*, translated from German (Vienna: G. Ueberreuter, 1813); and Isaac Bloch, *Petit Catéchisme Israélite* (Paris: Durlacher, 1911).

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