Jews In Europe after the Shoah.
Studies and Research Perspectives
edited by Laura Brazzo and Guri Schwarz
Summary

Focus

**Jews In Europe after the Shoah. Studies and Research Perspectives**
*Introduction*
by Laura Brazzo and Guri Schwarz

Anthony D. Kauders
*West German Jews: Guilt, Power and Pluralism*

András Kovács
*Jews and Jewishness in Post-war Hungary*

Carla Tonini
*The Jews in Poland after the Second World War. Most Recent Contributions of Polish Historiography*

Antonella Salomoni
*State-sponsored Anti-Semitism in Postwar USSR. Studies and Research Perspectives*

Arturo Marzano
*“Prisoners of Hope” or “Amnesia”? The Italian Holocaust Survivors and Their Aliyah to Israel*

Elena Mazzini
*Presence of Antisemitism in the Catholic world. The case of the «Enciclopedia Cattolica» (1948-1954)*

Discussion

David Bidussa (ed.), *Ebraismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008)
by Anna Foa, Giovanni Levi

Reviews

David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*
by Francesca Bregoli
Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* 
by Cristiana Facchini

Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-century British Literary Culture* 
by Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti

Georges Bensoussan, *Un nom impérissable. Israël, le sionisme et la destruction des Juifs d'Europe* 
by Arturo Marzano and Marcella Simoni
Jews in Europe after the Shoah.
Studies and Research Perspectives

Introduction
by Laura Brazzo and Guri Schwarz

This monographic section (Focus) of the first issue of Quest is dedicated to the study of post-Holocaust European Jewry, a theme that only in very recent years has begun to be the object of systematic scholarly research. The turning point was of course the end of the cold war. In the early Nineties the palpable sense that new challenges were taking shape led Jewish intellectuals to tackle, on the one hand, delicate issues regarding the future of the Jews and, on the other, opened new possibilities for historical research. In 1996, British scholar Bernard Wasserstein boldly engaged in a narration of European Jewish history after 1945, offering the first global overview of Jewish life in Eastern and Western Europe. His analysis took off from the catastrophic consequences of the Holocaust, moving on to post-war reconstruction, the persistence of old anti-Semitic sentiments and the development of newer anti-Jewish ideologies, the issues raised by the birth of the Jewish State. However, what appears to be more striking is that his study was based on the assumption that European Jewry was a rapidly decaying body; once again assimilation was seen as a tremendous threat, capable of causing the final disappearance of European Jewry which Wasserstein depicted as a «vanishing diaspora»¹. A few years earlier David Vital had been pondering on «the future of the Jews» and his outlook was also quite pessimistic². In his view a key problem was represented by the uneasy relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, viewed as the symptom of the irresolvable fragmentation of the Jewish world.

In many ways the preoccupation of Wasserstein and Vital expressed a very common and often re-emerging trait in Jewish self-representation: Jews thinking of themselves as «an ever-dying people». As David Rawidowicz has shown, such a mode of self-portrayal has been instrumental to self-preservation, as fear represented a resource that could help guarantee survival³. It is surprising to register how such dramatic and negative views of European Jewry have been rapidly substituted by a new self-consciousness and a more optimistic outlook. As Israeli historian Dan Michman has lucidly noted, since the beginning of the 21st century meaningful changes took place in European-Jewish

self-perception, influencing also the way in which 20th century history can be read. Seen today, after the unexpected intense entrance of ‘new’ Jews in the European community, the desperate lamentations heard in the 1990s about the unstoppable demographic decline of European Jewry seem exaggerated and misleading. A decisive turning point was represented by the shift in the migratory flux of Russian Jews: after heading primarily to the US and to Israel in the 1980s and early 1990s, these groups started moving in considerable numbers to Western Europe, and to Germany in particular. Demography and new immigration have thus certainly played a role in this new consideration, but that is only a part of the story. If we look at European Jewry today we see a varied and composite world, marked by a consistent fragmentation, and yet in some ways more lively than it has been for the previous sixty years. Following the symbolic events of 1989, new Jewish identities have started to emerge, especially but not only in Eastern Europe.

The last twenty years have seen a paradigm shift in national memories, placing an unparalleled emphasis on the Holocaust and on the Jewish plight throughout the continent. Single national narratives started changing and, overall, it seems that Europe has acknowledged the Jewish tragedy as a key event in the fashioning of its history: the date of the 27th of January, which commemorates the opening of the gates of Auschwitz by the Soviet army, is one of the very few – if not possibly the only – common commemorative ritual shared by the countries of the European Union. Jews are not alone anymore in sustaining the burden of memory. Parallel to the rise of new commemorative paradigms, a growing interest in Jewish folklore and tradition has also developed in non-Jewish European culture, with varying results that range from an archeological recovery of lost traditions to sheer invention and construction of Jewish festivals for the sake of the tourism industry. All in all, it can be

doubted whether European Jewry can become the «third pillar» - after
Israel and the USA - of an authentic and renewed Jewish culture. More
than taking the form of one single pillar, European Jews still appear as
separated and distant worlds within a feebly united Europe. Nonetheless it seems that we can look at Jewish communities and Jewish
life in the European context possibly with less anxiety and with a
different awareness of the opportunities and challenges that the future
poses. We believe this different outlook also implies a chance and a need
to reconsider post WWII European Jewish history.

Until World War II, Europe was undeniably the main center of Jewish
life. Afterwards it became a peripheral site, both from a demographic
and from cultural standpoint, while only in the latest period the role and
position - between Israel and America - of the still small European-
Jewish group is being reconsidered. In this respect the impact of Nazi
policies was tragically immense: in the immediate post-war years the Jews
in Europe were merely survivors, a scarce remnant of a once flourishing
and multicolored social reality. In the first years following 1945 the key
issue was the colossal difficulty – if not the impossibility – of thinking
and performing a re-establishment of Jewish life in a continent that had
witnessed appalling destruction. Never before had the Zionist ideal
seemed more crucial for the future of the Jews, and never had it been so
attractive for Western European Jews. It seemed as though the dreams
of a positive integration in European societies had been shattered and
the only possible response was in the creation of a Jewish Nation. Indeed
one of the principal historical issues concerning the immediate post-1945
situation was the development of an unprecedented sympathy for the
Zionist cause among European Jewry and – in parallel – the troublesome
migration of many survivors to the ‘promised land’. This story, the
events that converge into what is generally known as the Aliyah Bet are
relatively well known; this is probably the single aspect of post-war
European Jewish history that has been studied the most, the reason
being quite clear. The epos of the illegal immigration to Palestine,
violating the British naval blockade, was to constitute a part of the grand
narrative of courage, pride and self-determination that would support

9 D. Pinto, “The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity”, in Jewish Studies at
the Central European University. Public Lectures 1996-1999, ed. András Kovács, (Budapest:
Central European University, 2000), 177-99.

10 See for example S. Ilan Troen (Ed.), Jewish Centers and Peripheries. Europe between
America and Israel Fifty Years after WWII, (New Brunswick (N.J.): Transaction Publishers,
1999).

11 For a documented overview of geographic and demographic changes, and on the
redistribution of world Jewry after 1945, see U. O. Schmelz, The demographic impact of the
Holocaust, see also S. Della Pergola, Changing Cores and Peripheries: Fifty Years in Socio-
Demographic Perspective. Both articles are published in R. Wistrich (Ed.), Terms of Survival.
The Jewish World after 1945, (London: Routledge, 1995), see respectively, 42-54 and 11-
41.
the building of the Israeli national rhetoric. From a Zionist point of view those that did not seek refuge in the Jewish State were but a residue of a once vital branch of world Jewry. A similar outlook was shared by American Jews, who thought of themselves as the true heirs of the once glorious European Jewish legacy. Those who remained in Old Europe, those who did not flee to Israel or to other destinations, those who came back to Europe in the post-war, after having found temporary refuge in the Americas or in Palestine during the war years, had to face the challenges of reintegration, which were of course quite different in the varying national contexts. This is a story that in many respects still needs to be told. We have had some meaningful historical insight on the complex issues of reparations and property restitutions in the aftermath of the war, a side effect of the continent-wide movement – involving most European governments – that developed in the 1990s as a consequence of American law-suits. Nonetheless, issues concerning reintegration, both from cultural and socio-economic perspective, still have to be properly analyzed. Some research has been done on single national cases but we still lack sufficient elements to draw a broader, European picture. For example the support of American Jewry, principally through the American Joint Distribution Committee, undoubtedly represented a vital resource that greatly influenced the reconstruction trajectories, but we still have to systematically study such actions and their long term consequences.


13 For a wide European picture of reparation and restitution policies see C. Goschelr, P. Ther (Eds.), *Raub und Restitution. Arierisierung und Rückerstattung jüdische Eigentums in Europa*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003).


15 For a positive contribution in this direction see D. Bankier (Ed.), *The Jews are Coming Back. The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after WWII*, (Jerusalem: Bergham Books-Yad Vashem, 2005).

16 Some interesting hypotheses, whose value deserve to be verified by extending research to other countries, have been made by M. Mandel, “Philanthropy or Cultural Imperialism? The Impact of American Jewish Aid in Post-Holocaust France”, *Jewish Social Studies* n. 1 (2002), 53-94.
Reintegration was not merely confined to the recovery lost property and of civil rights that had been denied on a racial basis. It was also, and primarily, a cultural and psychological process. In re-entering society, Jewish individuals and Jewish institutions had to rethink their place and their role within each single national context. Every state in continental Europe was forced to define its position in relationship to the actions of the local fascist or collaborationist forces, not only on a judicial or diplomatic level, but also in moral and cultural terms. The strategies adopted by the governing groups in each country in facing the responsibilities of the past and in protecting national interests could have grave and long-lasting consequences. They would contribute substantially to the remodeling of national identities and influence the cultures and mentalities that shaped the political systems developing in post-Fascist Europe. How did the Jews and their peculiar story fit into those pictures? The development, in Western Europe, of national narratives centered on an idea of collective suffering made it possible to include the specific Jewish tragedy, while at the same time denying or minimizing its specificity. Certainly a key role was played by the efforts of all European nation-states to discharge themselves of the guilt connected to racial persecutions, pouring the blame on Germany alone. In this case, the Italian dynamics appear particularly relevant: in fact they show how the political and cultural system could rebuke its responsibilities regarding racial persecutions, adopted in full autonomy since 1938, and in so doing, how it could build a key part of their renewed anti-fascist national self-image. It is interesting to register how Italian Jews and Italian Jewish institutions actively participated to such a process, giving strong support to the construction of the ‘myth of the good Italian’: a cultural construction that allowed the Jews of the peninsula to justify both their attachment to the home country and their wish to rapidly reintegrate in post-fascist society. This is one of the reasons why, as Arturo Marzano shows in his article, most Italian Jews did not contemplate emigration to Palestine and later Israel in the same...

---

immediate post-war years in which about 30,000 mainly Eastern European Jews were crossing the peninsula headed to the Jewish homeland. While the Italian case is certainly extreme, similar dynamics took place in other Western countries. On the other hand a disturbing uneasiness regarding the possibility to rationalize the desire to reintegrate would have permanently scarred German Jews and those Eastern European Jews who settled in post-war Germany. Holocaust memory was of course a very heavy burden that weighed on German society and culture. Not surprisingly the German case, and the history of the Jews in post-war West-Germany has been a true historiographical laboratory, setting up in some respects a model for research on post-war Jewish societies. Since the ground-breaking contribution made to the subject by Michael Brenner, studies have developed at a remarkably high pace, stressing not only the practical difficulties faced in re-entering society, but also the guilt feelings and the troubled conscience that affected German-Jewish identity, as well as the role of Jews and Jewish institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany. Anthony Kauders’ article confronts the delicate question of Jewish life in the Federal Republic of Germany, placing at the center of his analysis the sensation of living «in the wrong country», in that same German soil that harbored the rise of national-socialism. European Jewish history in the post-war era is not only the history of those survivors who, for various reasons chose to remain in the old continent; it is also a history that was greatly affected by the arrival of new, ‘different’ Jews. In the decades separating us from the war, European Jewry has changed a great deal, both from a demographic and cultural stance. Since the late 1960s unexpected migratory movements have enriched and transformed Jewish life in Europe. We have in fact to consider the income of Jews from the Southern Mediterranean – Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria – who settled mainly in France (doubling its Jewish population), who certainly

---


23 Beyond France, where about 220,000 Jews from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria settled between the 1950s and the 1960s, it must be noted that about 3000 Jews from Libya moved to Italy, while other Jewish groups from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria also settled in Italy, France and the UK. For statistical figures and attempts at analysing the French
introduced new cultural traits and who contributed in raising new issues in European Jewish life. But we also have to remember the emigration of Jews from Poland as a result of a new wave of anti-Semitism in 1968. In the post-war era Eastern and Western Jewries, Ashkenazi and Sephardic cultures have mixed and mingled in a possibly unprecedented manner. Thus European Jewry was transformed, as a new mixture of Jewish cultures and traditions slowly started taking form. One of the curious and yet significant issues is that the European Jewish population is made up of individuals who not only did not leave as a result of the Holocaust, but also of Jewish groups that after the war and after the creation of the State of Israel preferred to settle in Europe when — for various reasons — they were pushed out of their countries of origin. So it would seem that European Jewry did not embrace the Zionist ideal, and yet no force or idea other than Zionism had more influence in reshaping Jewish identity in Europe. After the war a new sense of belonging to a collective entity, resulting also from the identity forcibly imposed by racial persecutions, emerged among European Jews. This collective conscience was strongly and rapidly marked by the Zionist ideology. As the articles of Kauders on Germany and Kovács on Hungary show us, even those Jewish communities which had long resisted the Zionist call, nurtured a new fascination for that project since the immediate post-war years. From being a minority movement in Europe, Zionism (and the State of Israel) in the post-war turned into a common reference point for most Jews of the continent. In Italy, for example, the organized pro-Zionist minority rapidly conquered control of Jewish communal institutions since 1946. In all of Western Europe the pro-Zionist orientation certainly influenced the role and public position of Jewish institutions, who often tried to behave as cultural mediators between Israel and the respective national political and cultural systems. More than that, the Zionist issue became a pivotal point

24 In the eyes of Shmuel Trigano this was one of the elements that generated a “new Jewish Question”, challenging the assimilationist ideal of a Jewish identity that should manifest itself mainly, or solely, in the private sphere. See ID., La nouvelle question juive, (Paris: Gallimard, 2002 (or. ed. 1979)).


in a new, stronger collective identity. French intellectual Shmuel Trigano has written about a «community Zionism», a fascination for the Zionist rhetoric which did not push most Jews toward emigration and an effective realization of the Zionist project, but that rather contributed to shape growing community ties, a new sense of belonging. Through their public and explicit pro-Zionist stance, the non-religious Jews of the West were somehow able to fill with meaning that Jewish identity that they felt to be important and yet had a great difficulty interpreting. The support for Israel and a generic pro-Zionist stance were the building blocks of a Jewish identity that would manifest itself openly in the public sphere; in Western Europe Jewishness was not anymore a private and personal issue, but became a factor that would mould a collectivity, a group that would participate in public life as such. This new sentiment combined with the idea, that rapidly spread since the 1970s, that Jews (as well as other groups) would not only have a right to equality, but also a fundamental right to manifest their difference without shame or fear; it was this new feeling identity that allowed Jews in France, Italy and Germany to explicitly manifest multiple loyalties with an unprecedented liberty. This does not mean that there were no difficulties or that anti-Zionist sentiments in each country would not create uneasiness within Jewish communities, but it must be recognized that never before in European Jewish history the minority was more free to explicitly manifest its polysemic identity.

This of course was not true for Jews living in Eastern Europe. Kovács’ article clearly shows how, with the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, the Jewish condition changed abruptly, leaving much less space for the expression of the pro-Zionist feelings than in the immediate post-war years. In fact, one of the key factors that we have to keep in mind in confronting Eastern and Western Europe is not only the latter’s incomparable freedom, but also the different role played by anti-Semitic prejudice in the two areas. While in the West public manifestations of Anti-Semitism became a taboo, relegated to tiny minority groups, in the East popular and ideological anti-Semitism played a fundamental role in shaping the Jewish condition. This subject

---

is at the center of the two essays by Salomoni and Tonini dealing respectively with the Soviet and Polish cases.

Antonella Salomoni concentrates her attention on the rapid development of new researches – that took off since the early 1990s - on the role of anti-Semitism in the late years of the Stalinist season. At the center of her analysis is the recent debate on the presumed preparations for a mass deportation of Soviet Jews. She indicates how the latest studies - conducted on a local level - allow us to better understand both the collective psychoses that struck Soviet Jews in the immediate aftermath of the war, as well as to ascertain the existence of a planned design to mobilize the population through the manipulation of Judeophobia. The interconnection between popular and traditional anti-Semitism, and the shifting ideological movements of the Communist regime in Poland, lies at the heart of Carla Tonini’s paper. Her analysis offers us a broad and rich picture of the internal Polish debate - started in the 1980s – on the role of anti-Semitism in popular culture, as well as of the recent findings on various problems ranging from property restitutions and the difficult post-war reintegration to Jewish emigration and the Zionist issue.

Traditional catholic religious intolerance and its role in Polish culture and identity leads to reflect on one last fundamental element that has to be kept in consideration in analyzing post-war European Jewish history. In the decades following 1945 the attitudes of the Christian churches towards the Jews and the Jewish question have changed significantly. The echoes of the Holocaust certainly played a great role in forcing the Christian faiths to revise and reconsider their relationship with the Jews. It was, of course, a slow and non-linear development. Elena Mazzini’s article, concentrating on one single peculiar source such as the Catholic Encyclopedia, published between 1948 and 1952, allows us to verify the uneasiness with which Catholic culture faced the issue of anti-Semitism. As we know a new and finally different approach to the problem would have matured only with the Second Vatican Council.\(^\text{30}\)

\* \* \*

The intent of this monographic issue is to offer a broad view on the history and historiography concerning post-war Jewish life in various European countries: Germany, Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union. An article dealing with the French case was also expected, but did not reach us in time for the publication of this issue. We also chose not to dedicate a single article to the Italian case. In part this decision was made because such a paper has been very recently published by one of the

---

\(^{30}\) On the issue see the fundamental study by G. Miccoli, *Due nodi: la libertà religiosa e le relazioni con gli ebrei*, in G. Alberigo (Ed.), *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, (Bologna: Peeters/Il Mulino, 1999), vol. 4, 199-219.
Introduction

But also because we thought it would be interesting to offer two examples of how research on peculiar issues - such as Holocaust survivors and emigration to Palestine/Israel and the Catholic reappraisal of the anti-Semitic discourse in the post-war years - would offer the chance to verify how studies on specific themes is fundamental for the development of a better understanding of wider problems. All the selected authors who answered our call for articles were asked to overview the state of the art concerning the history of the Jews in each specific national context and to suggest (if possible) new research perspectives. Our intention was to grant the authors ample margins to freely interpret the post-war order, concentrating on the problems they believed more relevant, and applying the methodology they saw most fit. Notwithstanding the ‘third pillar ideology’ it is still quite difficult to weave different national cases in a coherently intertwined pattern. Imagining one European Jewish community appears quite problematic and, ultimately, unrealistic. Keeping this in mind, the end result we were looking for was not a tightly coherent and unified final outlook, but rather the presentations of variations and diversities, illustrating multiple and multi-faceted approaches to the subject. Obviously we do not expect this rapid overview to offer a complete and systematic analysis of all issues and problems concerning the study of Jewish life in post-war Europe. Our goal was to raise, on a transnational and European scale, a series of key questions. The articles gathered here illustrate similarities and differences in the various national cases, as well as the very different approaches and historiographical sensibilities with which such a complex and elusive subject can be confronted.

Laura Brazzo received a Phd in Political Science at the Università degli Studi di Pavia in 2007. Between 2002 and 2007 she has been a member of the Centro di Politica Estera e Opinione pubblica at the Università degli Studi di Milano and was a member of the Secretariat of the Commission of History of International Relations. Currently she works as a researcher at the Fondazione CDEC of Milano. Main publications: “Il Consiglio d’Europa e Israele (1956-1973)” in Europa in Progress a cura di F. Di Sarcina - L. Grazi - L. Scichilone (Milano: Franco Angeli editore, 2005); Angelo Sullam e il sionismo in Italia dalla crisi di fine secolo alla guerra di Libia, Firenze: Dante Alighieri editore, 2007). Forthcoming, “Sidney Sonnino, il Ministero degli Esteri e la Palestina”, in Atti del Convegno di Studio “Sonnino e il suo tempo (1914-1922)” (Firenze, Polistampa); Europa e Israele. La Comunità europea, Israele e il conflitto arabo-israeliano 1957-1973 (Milano: Unicopli).

Guri Schwarz (Milan, 1975) received a Phd summa cum laude in Historical Disciplines at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa in 2002. Since 2003 he is member of the Interdepartmental Center for Jewish Studies of the University of Pisa and since 2005 he is member of the Scientific Board of the CDEC Foundation (Milan). Currently teaches contemporary Jewish history at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pisa. Main Publications: Ritrovare se stessi. Gli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004); Dalla Guerra alla Pace. Retoriche e Pratiche della smobilitazione nell'Italia del Novecento (with M. Mondini), (Verona: Cierre-Istrevi, 2007). He also edited the diaries of the Jewish partisan Emanuele Artom: Diari di un partigiano ebreo (gennaio 1940- febbraio 1944), (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008).

How to quote this article:

URL http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/home.php?issue=1